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PROLEGOMENA
To BELL's Edition of
SHAKSPERE's WORKS,

CONTAINING

the Preface of the PLAYERS to their Edition in Folio, 1623.
F. POPE's Preface.
F. THEOBALD's Preface.
F. T. HANMER's Preface.
F. WARBURTON's Preface.
Mr. STEEVENS's Advertisement to the Twenty Old Quartos.
Part of Dr. JOHNSON's Preface.

EMBELLISHMENT.

Portrait of SHAKSPERE, copied from the Frontispiece to his
Plays, Folio, 1623. *Martin Droeshout, Sc.*

London: Sold by the Proprietor, BRITISH-LIBRARY, Strand.
Price One Shilling and Sixpence.

To the PUBLIC.

THIS Work is intended to supercede the necessity for any other Edition whatever, as it will be calculated to gratify every class of Readers.

The Plan is to print each Play, *singly*, and *entire*, from the last revisions of Dr. SAMUEL JOHNSON, and GEORGE STEEVENS, Esq. &c. with *their Characters* of the Play, and *the Origin of the Fable*, as an Introductory Preface to each Play.

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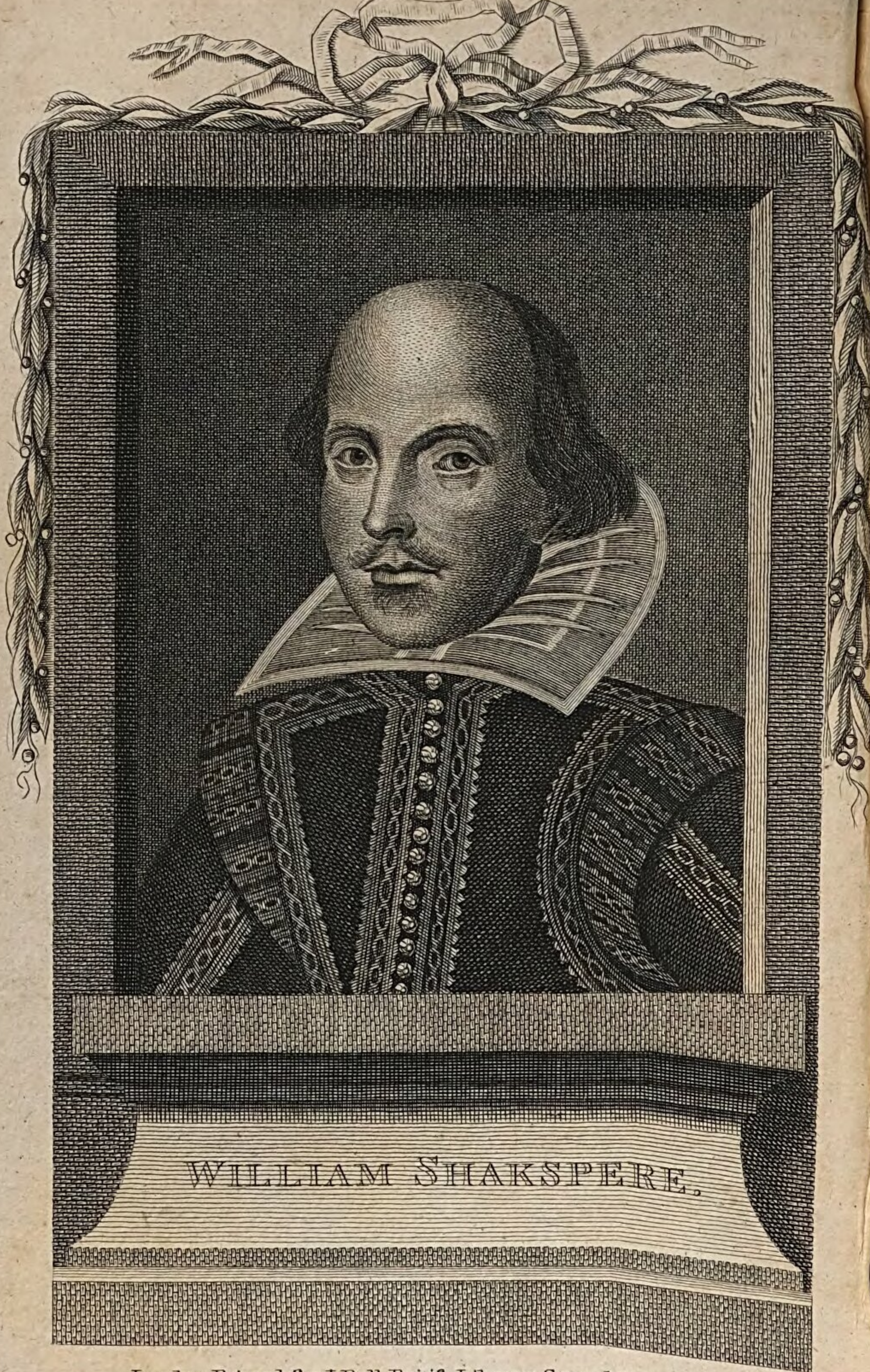
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London Printed for J. Bell British Library Strand Sep^r 5th 1786.

PROLEGOMENA

T O T H E

DRAMATICK WRITINGS

O F

WILL. SHAKSPERE.

— SIC ITUR AD ASTRA.

VIRG.

LONDON :

Printed for, and under the Direction of,

JOHN BELL, British-Library, STRAND,

Bookseller to His Royal Highness the PRINCE of WALES.

M D C C L X X X V I.



PROLEGOMENA.

T H E

PREFACE OF THE *PLAYERS*

to their Edition in Folio, 1623.

To the great Variety of READERS.

FROM the most able, to him that can but spell: there you are number'd, we had rather you were weigh'd. Especially, when the fate of all bookes depends upon your capacities; and not of your heads alone, but of your purses. Well! it is now publique, and you will stand for your priviledges, we know, to read, and censure. Doe so, but buy it first. That doth best commend a booke, the stationer saies. Then, how odde soever your braines be, or your wisdomes, make your licence the same, and spare not. Judge your sixe-pen'orth, your shillings worth, your five shillings worth at a time, or higher, so you rise to the just

A ij

rates,

rates, and welcome. But, whatever you doe, buy. Censure will not drive a trade, or make the jacke goe. And though you be a magistrate of wit, and sit on the stage at Black-Friars, or the Cock-Pit, to arraigne plays dayly, know, these playes have had their triall already, and stood out all appeales; and do now come forth quitted rather by a decree of court, than any purchas'd letters of commendation.

It had bene a thing, we confesse, worthie to have been wished, that the author himself had liv'd to have set forth, and overseen his owne writings; but since it hath been ordained otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envy his friends, the office of their care and paine, to have collected and published them; and so to have published them, as where (before) you were abused with divers stolne and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors, that exposed them: even those are now offered to your view cured, and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers as he conceived them. Who, as he was a happy imitator of nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His minde and hand went together: and what he thought, he uttered with that easinesse, that wee have scarce received from him a blot in his papers. But it is not our province who onely gather his workes, and give them you, to praise him. It is yours that reade him. And there we hope, to your divers capacities, you will finde enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie
hid,

hid, than it could be lost. Reade him, therefore; and againe, and againe: and if then you doe not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his friends, who, if you need, can be your guides: if you need them not, you can leade yourselves, and others. And such readers we wish him.

JOHN HEMINGE.

HENRIE CONDELL.

MR. POPE's
P R E F A C E.

It is not my design to enter into a criticism upon this author: though to do it effectually, and not superficially, would be the best occasion that any just writer could take, to form the judgment and taste of our nation. For of all English poets Shakspeare must be confessed to be the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, and to afford the most numerous, as well as most conspicuous instances, both of beauties and faults of all sorts. But this far exceeds the bounds of a preface, the business of which is only to give an account of the fate of his works, and the disadvantages under which they have been transmitted to us. We shall hereby extenuate many faults which are his, and clear him from the imputation of many which are not: a design, which, though it can be no guide to future criticks to do him justice in one way, will at least be sufficient to prevent their doing him an injustice in the other.

I cannot however but mention some of his principal and characteristick excellencies, for which (notwithstanding his defects) he is justly and universally elevated above all other dramattick writers. Not that

this is the proper place of praising him, but because I would not omit any occasion of doing it.

If ever any author deserved the name of an *original*, it was Shakspeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through Ægyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakspeare was inspiration indeed: he is not so much an imitator, as an instrument, of nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him.

His *characters* are so much nature herself, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as copies of her. Those of other poets have a constant resemblance, which shews that they received them from one another, and were but multipliers of the same image: each picture, like a mock-rainbow, is but the reflection of a reflection. But every single character in Shakspeare is as much an individual, as those in life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such, as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be twins, will, upon comparison, be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of character, we must add the wonderful preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays, that had all the speeches been printed without the very names of the persons, I believe one might have applied them with certainty to every speaker.

The *power* over our *passions* was never possessed in a more eminent degree, or displayed in so different instances. Yet all along there is seen no labour, no pains to raise them; no preparation to guide our guess to the effect, or be perceived to lead toward it: but the heart swells, and the tears burst out, just at the proper places: we are surprised the moment we weep; and yet upon reflection find the passion so just, that we should be surprised if we had not wept, and wept at that very moment.

How astonishing is it again, that the passions directly opposite to these, laughter and spleen, are no less at his command; that he is not more a master of the *great* than of the *ridiculous* in human nature; of our noblest tendernesses, than of our vainest foibles; of our strongest emotions, than of our idlest sensations!

Nor does he only excel in the passions; in the coolness of reflection and reasoning he is full as admirable. His *sentiments* are not only in general the most pertinent and judicious upon every subject; but, by a talent very peculiar, something between penetration and felicity, he hits upon that particular point on which the bent of each argument turns, or the force of each motive depends. This is perfectly amazing, from a man of no education or experience in those great and publick scenes of life which are usually the subject of his thoughts: so that he seems to have known the world by intuition, to have looked through human nature at one glance, and to be the only author that gives ground
for

for a very new opinion, that the philosopher, and even the man of the world, may be *born*, as well as the poet.

It must be owned, that with all these great excellencies, he has almost as great defects; and that as he has certainly written better, so he has perhaps written worse than any other. But I think I can in some measure account for these defects, from several causes and accidents; without which it is hard to imagine that so large and so enlightened a mind could ever have been susceptible of them. That all these contingencies should unite to his disadvantage seems to me almost as singularly unlucky, as that so many various (nay contrary) talents should meet in one man, was happy and extraordinary.

It must be allowed that stage-poetry, of all other, is more particularly levelled to please the populace, and its success more immediately depending upon the *common suffrage*. One cannot therefore wonder, if Shakspeare, having at his first appearance no other aim in his writings than to procure a subsistence, directed his endeavours solely to hit the taste and humour that then prevailed. The audience was generally composed of the meaner sort of people; and therefore the images of life were to be drawn from those of their own rank: accordingly we find, that not our author's only, but almost all the old comedies have their scene among *tradesmen* and *mechanicks*: and even their historical plays strictly follow the common *old stories* or *vulgar traditions* of that kind of people. In
tragedy,

tragedy, nothing was so sure to *surprize* and cause *admiration*, as the most strange, unexpected, and consequently most unnatural, events and incidents; the most exaggerated thoughts; the most verbose and bombast expression; the most pompous rhymes, and thundering versification. In comedy, nothing was so sure to *please*, as mean buffoonry, vile ribaldry, and unmannerly jest of fools and clowns. Yet even in these our author's wit buoys up, and is borne above his subject: his genius in those low parts is like some prince of a romance in the disguise of a shepherd or peasant; a certain greatness and spirit now and then break out, which manifest his higher extraction and qualities.

It may be added, that not only the common audience had no notion of the rules of writing, but few even of the better sort piqued themselves upon any great degree of knowledge or nicety that way; till Ben Jonson, getting possession of the stage, brought critical learning into vogue: and that this was not done without difficulty, may appear from those frequent lessons (and indeed almost declamations) which he was forced to prefix to his first plays, and put into the mouth of his actors, the *grex*, *chorus*, &c. to remove the prejudices, and inform the judgment of his hearers. 'Till then, our authors had no thoughts of writing on the model of the ancients: their tragedies were only histories in dialogue; and their comedies followed the thread of any novel as they found it, no less implicitly than if it had been true history.

To judge therefore of Shakspeare by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another. He writ to the *people*; and writ at first without patronage from the better sort, and therefore without aims of pleasing them; without assistance or advice from the learned, as without the advantage of education or acquaintance among them; without that knowledge of the best models, the ancients, to inspire him with an emulation of them; in a word, without any views of reputation, and of what poets are pleased to call immortality; some or all of which have encouraged the vanity, or animated the ambition, of other writers.

Yet it must be observed, that when his performances had merited the protection of his prince, and when the encouragement of the court had succeeded to that of the town, the works of his riper years are manifestly raised above those of his former. The dates of his plays sufficiently evidence that his productions improved in proportion to the respect he had for his auditors. And I make no doubt this observation would be found true in every instance, were but editions extant from which we might learn the exact time when every piece was composed, and whether writ for the town, or the court.

Another cause (and no less strong than the former) may be deduced from our author's being a *player*, and forming himself first upon the judgments of that body of men whereof he was a member. They have ever had a standard to themselves, upon other principles than

than those of Aristotle. As they live by the majority, they know no rule but that of pleasing the present humour, and complying with the wit in fashion; a consideration which brings all their judgment to a short point. Players are just such judges of what is *right*, as tailors are of what is *graceful*. And in this view it will be but fair to allow, that most of our author's faults are less to be ascribed to his wrong judgment as a poet, than to his right judgment as a player.

By these men it was thought a praise to Shakspeare, that he scarce ever *blotted a line*. This they industriously propagated, as appears from what we are told by Ben Jonson in his *Discoveries*, and from the preface of *Heminge and Condell* to the first folio edition. But in reality (however it has prevailed) there never was a more groundless report, or to the contrary of which there are more undeniable evidences: as, the comedy of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which he entirely new writ; *The History of Henry the Sixth*, which was first published under the title of *The Contention of York and Lancaster*; and that of *Henry the Fifth*, extremely improved; that of *Hamlet*, enlarged to almost as much again as at first; and many others. I believe the common opinion of his want of learning proceeded from no better ground. This too might be thought a praise by some; and to this his errors have as injudiciously been ascribed by others. For it is certain, were it true, it could concern but a small part of them; the most are such as are not properly defects, but superfluities and arise not from want of learning or reading.

reading, but from want of thinking or judging: or rather (to be more just to our author) from a compliance to those wants in others. As to a wrong choice of the subject, a wrong conduct of the incidents, false thoughts, forced expressions, &c. if these are not to be ascribed to the aforesaid accidental reasons, they must be charged upon the poet himself, and there is no help for it. But I think the two disadvantages which I have mentioned (to be obliged to please the lowest of the people, and to keep the worst of company), if the consideration be extended as far as it reasonably may, will appear sufficient to mislead and depress the greatest genius upon earth. Nay, the more modesty with which such a one is endued, the more he is in danger of submitting and conforming to others, against his own better judgment.

But as to his *want of learning*, it may be necessary to say something more: there is certainly a vast difference between *learning* and *languages*. How far he was ignorant of the latter, I cannot determine; but it is plain he had much reading at least, if they will not call it learning. Nor is it any great matter, if a man has knowledge, whether he has it from one language or from another. Nothing is more evident than that he had a taste of natural philosophy, mechanicks, ancient and modern history, poetical learning, and mythology: we find him very knowing in the customs, rites, and manners of antiquity. In *Coriolanus*, and *Julius Caesar*, not only the spirit, but manners of the Romans are exactly drawn; and still a nicer distinction

is shewn between the manners of the Romans in the time of the former, and of the latter. His reading in the ancient historians is no less conspicuous, in many references to particular passages: and the speeches copied from Plutarch in *Coriolanus* may, I think, as well be made an instance of his learning, as those copied from Cicero in *Catiline*, of Ben Jonson's. The manners of other nations in general, the Egyptians, Venetians, French, &c. are drawn with equal propriety. Whatever object of nature, or branch of science, he either speaks of or describes, it is always with competent, if not extensive knowledge: his descriptions are still exact; all his metaphors appropriated, and remarkably drawn from the true nature and inherent qualities of each subject. When he treats of ethick or politick, we may constantly observe a wonderful justness of distinction, as well as extent of comprehension. No one is more a master of the poetical story, or has more frequent allusions to the various parts of it: Mr. Waller (who has been celebrated for this last particular) has not shewn more learning this way than Shakspeare. We have translations from *Ovid* published in his name, among those poems which pass for his, and for some of which we have undoubted authority (being published by himself, and dedicated to his noble patron the earl of Southampton): he appears also to have been conversant in *Plautus*, from whom he has taken the plot of one of his plays: he follows the Greek authors, and particularly Dares Phrygius, in another (although I will
not

not pretend to say in what language he read them). The modern Italian writers of *novels* he was manifestly acquainted with; and we may conclude him to be no less conversant with the ancients of his own country, from the use he has made of Chaucer in *Troilus and Cressida*, and in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, if that play be his, as there goes a tradition it was (and indeed it has little resemblance of Fletcher, and more of our author than some of those which have been received as genuine).

I am inclined to think this opinion proceeded originally from the zeal of the partizans of our author and Ben Jonson: as they endeavoured to exalt the one at the expence of the other. It is ever the nature of parties to be in extremes; and nothing is so probable, as that, because Ben Jonson had much the more learning, it was said on the one hand that Shakspeare had none at all; and because Shakspeare had much the most wit and fancy, it was retorted on the other, that Jonson wanted both. Because Shakspeare borrowed nothing, it was said that Ben Jonson borrowed every thing. Because Jonson did not write extempore, he was reproached with being a year about every piece; and because Shakspeare wrote with ease and rapidity, they cried, he never once made a blot. Nay, the spirit of opposition ran so high, that whatever those of the one side objected to the other, was taken at the rebound, and turned into praises; as injudiciously, as their antagonists before had made them objections.

Poets are always afraid of envy; but sure they have as much reason to be afraid of admiration. They are the Scylla and Charybdis of authors; those who escape one, often fall by the other. *Pessimum genus inimicorum laudantes*, says Tacitus: and Virgil desires to wear a charm against those who praise a poet without rule or reason;

—— *Si ultra placitum laudârit baccare frontem*
Cingito, ne vati noceat———

But however this contention might be carried on by the partizans on either side, I cannot help thinking these two great poets were good friends, and lived on amicable terms, and in offices of society with each other. It is an acknowledged fact, that Ben Jonson was introduced upon the stage, and his first works encouraged, by Shakspeare; and after his death, that author writes, *To the memory of his beloved Mr. William Shakspeare*; which shews as if the friendship had continued through life. I cannot for my own part find any thing *invidious* or *sparing* in those verses, but wonder Mr. Dryden was of that opinion. He exalts him not only above all his contemporaries, but above Chaucer and Spenser, whom he will not allow to be great enough to be ranked with him; and challenges the names of Sophocles, Euripides, and Æschylus, nay all Greece and Rome at once, to equal him; and (which is very particular) expressly vindicates him from the imputation of wanting *art*, not enduring that all his excellencies should be attributed

attributed to *nature*. It is remarkable too, that the praise he gives him in his *Discoveries* seems to proceed from a *personal kindness*; he tells us, that he loved the man, as well as honoured his memory; celebrates the honesty, openness, and frankness of his temper; and only distinguishes, as he reasonably ought, between the real merit of the author, and the silly and derogatory applauses of the players. Ben Jonson might indeed be sparing in his commendations (though certainly he is not so in this instance), partly from his own nature, and partly from judgment. For men of judgment think they do any man more service in praising him justly, than lavishly. I say, I would fain believe they were friends, though the violence and ill-breeding of their followers and flatterers, were enough to give rise to the contrary report. I hope that it may be with *parties*, both in wit and state, as with those monsters described by the poets; and that their *heads* at least may have something human, though their *bodies* and *tails* are wild beasts and serpents.

As I believe that what I have mentioned gave rise to the opinion of Shakspeare's want of learning; so what has continued it down to us may have been the many blunders and illiteracies of the first publishers of his works. In these editions their ignorance shines in almost every page; nothing is more common than *Actus tertia. Exit omnes. Enter three Witches solus**.

* *Enter three witches solus.*] This blunder appears to be of Mr. Pope's own invention. It is not to be found in any one of the four folio copies of Macbeth; and there is no quarto edition of it extant.

STEEVENS.

B i i j

Their

Their French is as bad as their Latin, both in construction and spelling: their very Welsh is false. Nothing is more likely than that those palpable blunders of Hector's quoting Aristotle, with others of that gross kind, sprung from the same root: it not being at all credible that these could be the errors of any man who had the least tincture of a school, or the least conversation with such as had. Ben Jonson (whom they will not think partial to him) allows him at least to have had *some* Latin; which is utterly inconsistent with mistakes like these. Nay, the constant blunders in proper names of persons and places are such as must have proceeded from a man, who had not so much as read any history in any language: so could not be Shakspeare's.

I shall now lay before the reader some of those almost innumerable errors, which have risen from one source, the ignorance of the players, both as his actors, and as his editors. When the nature and kinds of these are enumerated and considered, I dare to say that not Shakspeare only, but Aristotle or Cicero, had their works undergone the same fate, might have appeared to want sense as well as learning.

It is not certain that any one of his plays was published by himself. During the time of his employment in the theatre, several of his pieces were printed separately in quarto. What makes me think that most of these were not published by him, is the excessive carelessness of the press: every page is so scandalously false spelled, and almost all the learned or unusual words

words so intolerably mangled, that it is plain there either was no corrector to the press at all, or one totally illiterate. If any were supervised by himself, I should fancy *The Two Parts of Henry the Fourth*, and *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, might have been so, because I find no other printed with any exactness; and (contrary to the rest) there is very little variation in all the subsequent editions of them. There are extant two prefaces to the first quarto edition of *Troilus and Cressida* in 1609, and to that of *Othello*; by which it appears, that the first was published without his knowledge or consent, or even before it was acted, so late as seven or eight years before he died: and that the latter was not printed till after his death. The whole number of genuine plays, which we have been able to find printed in his life-time, amounts but to eleven. And of some of these we meet with two or more editions by different printers, each of which has whole heaps of trash different from the other: which I should fancy was occasioned by their being taken from different copies belonging to different play-houses.

The folio edition (in which all the plays we now receive as his were first collected) was published by two players, Heminge and Condell, in 1623, seven years after his decease. They declare, that all the other editions were stolen and surreptitious, and affirm theirs to be purged from the errors of the former. This is true as to the literal errors, and no other; for in all respects else it is far worse than the quartos.

First, because the additions of trifling and bombast passages

passages are in this edition far more numerous. For whatever had been added, since those quartos, by the actors, or had stolen from their mouths into the written parts, were from thence conveyed into the printed text, and all stand charged upon the author. He himself complained of this usage in *Hamlet*, where he wishes that *those who play the clowns would speak no more than is set down for them*. (Act iii. Sc. 4.) But as a proof that he could not escape it, in the old editions of *Romeo and Juliet* there is no hint of a great number of the mean conceits and ribaldries now to be found there. In others, the low scenes of mobs, plebeians, and clowns, are vastly shorter than at present: and I have seen one in particular (which seems to have belonged to the play-house, by having the parts divided with lines, and the actors names in the margin), where several of those very passages were added in a written hand, which are since to be found in the folio.

In the next place, a number of beautiful passages, which are extant in the first single editions, are omitted in this; as it seems, without any other reason, than their willingness to shorten some scenes: these men (as it was said of Procrustes) either lopping, or stretching an author, to make him just fit for their stage.

This edition is said to be printed from the *original copies*; I believe they meant those which had lain ever since the author's days in the play-house, and had from time to time been cut, or added to, arbitrarily. It appears that this edition, as well as the quartos, was printed (at least partly) from no better copies than the

prompter's

prompter's book, or *piece-meal parts* written out for the use of the actors: for in some places their very * names are through carelessness set down instead of the *Personæ Dramatis*; and in others the notes of direction to the *property-men* for their *moveables*, and to the *players* for their *entries*, are inserted into the text through the ignorance of the transcribers.

The plays not having been before so much as distinguished by *Acts* and *Scenes*, they are in this edition divided according as they played them; often when there is no pause in the action, or where they thought fit to make a breach in it, for the sake of musick, masques, or monsters.

Sometimes the scenes are transposed and shuffled backward and forward; a thing which could no otherwise happen, but by their being taken from separate and piece-meal written parts.

Many verses are omitted entirely, and others transposed: from whence invincible obscurities have arisen, past the guess of any commentator to clear up, but just where the accidental glimpse of an old edition enlightens us.

Some characters were confounded and mixed, or two put into one, for want of a competent number of actors. Thus in the quarto edition of *Midsummer-*

* *Much Ado about Nothing*, Act ii. Enter Prince Leonato, Claudio, and Jack Wilson, instead of Balthasar. And in Act iv. Cowley and Kemp constantly through a whole scene.

Edit. fol. of 1623, and 1632.

Night's Dream, Act v. Shakspeare introduces a kind of master of the revels called *Philostrate*; all whose part is given to another character (that of *Egeus*) in the subsequent editions: so also in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. This too makes it probable that the prompter's books were what they called the original copies.

From liberties of this kind, many speeches also were put into the mouths of wrong persons, where the author now seems chargeable with making them speak out of character: or, sometimes, perhaps, for no better reason than that a governing player, to have the mouthing of some favourite speech himself, would snatch it from the unworthy lips of an underling.

Prose from verse they did not know, and they accordingly printed one for the other throughout the volume.

Having been forced to say so much of the players, I think I ought in justice to remark, that the judgment, as well as condition, of that class of people, was then far inferior to what it is in our days. As then the best play-houses were inns and taverns (the Globe, the Hope, the Red-Bull, the Fortune, &c.), so the top of the profession were then mere players, not gentlemen of the stage: they were led into the buttery by the steward, not placed at the lord's table, or lady's toilette; and consequently were entirely deprived of those advantages they now enjoy in the familiar conversation of our nobility, and an intimacy (not to say dearness) with people of the first condition.

From what has been said, there can be no question
but

but had Shakspeare published his works himself (especially in his latter time, and after his retreat from the stage), we should not only be certain which are genuine, but should find, in those that are, the errors lessened by some thousands. If I may judge from all the distinguishing marks of his style, and his manner of thinking and writing, I make no doubt to declare that those wretched plays, *Pericles*, *Lochrine*, *Sir John Oldcastle*, *Yorkshire Tragedy*, *Lord Cromwell*, *The Puritan*, and *London Prodigal*, cannot be admitted as his. And I should conjecture of some of the others (particularly *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Titus Andronicus*) that only some characters, single scenes, or perhaps a few particular passages, were of his hand. It is very probable what occasioned some plays to be supposed Shakspeare's was only this; that they were pieces produced by unknown authors, or fitted up for the theatre while it was under his administration; and no owner claiming them, they were adjudged to him, as they give strays to the lord of the manor: a mistake which (one may also observe) it was not for the interest of the house to remove. Yet the players themselves, Heminge and Condell, afterwards did Shakspeare the justice to reject those eight plays in their edition; though they were then printed in his name, in every body's hands, and acted with some applause (as we learn from what Ben Jonson says of *Pericles* in his ode on the *New-Inn*. That *Titus Andronicus* is one of this class, I am the rather induced to believe, by finding the same author openly express his contempt

contempt of it in the *induction* to *Bartholomew-Fair*, in the year 1614, when Shakspeare was yet living. And there is no better authority for these latter sort, than for the former, which were equally published in his life-time.

If we give into this opinion, how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him? And even in those which are really his, how many faults may have been unjustly laid to his account from arbitrary additions, expunctions, transpositions of scenes and lines, confusion of characters and persons, wrong application of speeches, corruptions of innumerable passages by the ignorance and wrong corrections of them again by the impertinence of his first editors? From one or other of these considerations, I am verily persuaded, that the greatest and the grossest part of what are thought his errors would vanish, and leave his character in a light very different from that disadvantageous one in which it now appears to us.

This is the state in which Shakspeare's writings lie at present; for, since the above-mentioned folio edition, all the rest have implicitly followed it, without having recourse to any of the former, or ever making the comparison between them. It is impossible to repair the injuries already done him; too much time has elapsed, and the materials are too few. In what I have done, I have rather given a proof of my willingness and desire, than of my ability, to do him justice. I have discharged the dull duty of an editor, to my
best

best judgment, with more labour than I expect thanks, with a religious abhorrence of all innovation, and without any indulgence to my private sense or conjecture. The method taken in this edition will shew itself. The various readings are fairly put in the margin, so that every one may compare them; and those I have preferred into the text are constantly *ex fide codicum*, upon authority. The alterations or additions, which Shakspeare himself made, are taken notice of as they occur. Some suspected passages, which are excessively bad (and which seem interpolations, by being so inserted, that one can entirely omit them without any chasm or deficiency in the context), are degraded to the bottom of the page; with an asterisk referring to the places of their insertion. The scenes are marked so distinctly, that every removal of place is specified; which is more necessary in this author than any other, since he shifts them more frequently; and sometimes, without attending to this particular, the reader would have met with obscurities. The more obsolete or unusual words are explained. Some of the most shining passages are distinguished by commas in the margin; and where the beauty lay not in particulars, but in the whole, a star is prefixed to the scene. This seems to me a shorter and less ostentatious method of performing the better half of criticism (namely the pointing out an author's excellencies) than to fill a whole paper with citations of fine passages, with *general applauses*, or *empty exclamations* at the tail of them. There is also subjoined a catalogue of those first editions, by which

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the greater part of the various readings, and of the corrected passages are authorized (most of which are such as carry their own evidence along with them). These editions now hold the place of originals, and are the only materials left to repair the deficiencies, or restore the corrupted sense of the author: I can only wish that a greater number of them (if a greater were ever published) may yet be found, by a search more successful than mine, for the better accomplishment of this end.

I will conclude by saying of Shakspeare, that with all his faults, and with all the irregularity of his *drama*, one may look upon his works, in comparison of those that are more finished and regular, as upon an ancient majestick piece of *Gothick* architecture, compared with a neat modern building: the latter is more elegant and glaring, but the former is more strong and more solemn. It must be allowed, that in one of these there are materials enough to make many of the other. It has much the greater variety, and much the nobler apartments; though we are often conducted to them by dark, odd, and uncouth passages. Nor does the whole fail to strike us with greater reverence, though many of the parts are childish, ill-placed, and unequal to its grandeur.

MR.

MR. THEOBALD'S

* P R E F A C E.

THE attempt to write upon SHAKSPERE is like going into a large, a spacious, and a splendid dome, through the conveyance of a narrow and obscure entry. A glare of light suddenly breaks upon you beyond what the avenue at first promised; and a thousand beauties of genius and character, like so many gaudy apartments pouring at once upon the eye, diffuse and throw themselves out to the mind. The prospect is too wide to come within the compass of a single view: it is a gay confusion of pleasing objects, too various to be enjoyed but in a general admiration: and they must be separated, and eyed distinctly, in order to give the proper entertainment.

And as, in great piles of building, some parts are often finished up to hit the taste of the *connoisseur*;

* This is Mr. Theobald's preface to his second edition in 1740, and had been much curtailed by himself after its first appearance before the impression in 1733. STEEVENS.

Cij

others

others more negligently put together, to strike the fancy of a common and unlearned beholder ; some parts are made stupendously magnificent and grand, to surprise with the vast design and execution of the architect ; others are contracted, to amuse you with his neatness and elegance in little : so, in Shakspeare, we may find *traits* that will stand the test of the severest judgment ; and strokes as carelessly hit off, to the level of the more ordinary capacities ; some descriptions raised to that pitch of grandeur, as to astonish you with the compass and elevation of his thought ; and others copying nature within so narrow, so confined a circle, as if the author's talent lay only at drawing in miniature.

In how many points of light must we be obliged to gaze at this great poet ! In how many branches of excellence to consider and admire him ! Whether we view him on the side of art or nature, he ought equally to engage our attention : whether we respect the force and greatness of his genius, the extent of his knowledge and reading, the power and address with which he throws out and applies either nature or learning, there is ample scope both for our wonder and pleasure. If his diction, and the clothing of his thoughts attract us, how much more must we be charmed with the richness and variety of his images and ideas ! If his images and ideas steal into our souls, and strike upon our fancy, how much are they improved in price, when we come to reflect with what propriety and justice they are applied to character ! If we look into his characters,
and

and how they are furnished and proportioned to the employment he cuts out for them, how are we taken up with the mastery of his portraits! What draughts of nature! What variety of originals, and how differing each from the other! How are they dressed from the stores of his own luxurious imagination; without being the apes of mode, or borrowing from any foreign wardrobe! Each of them are the standards of fashion for themselves: like gentlemen that are above the direction of their tailors, and can adorn themselves without the aid of imitation. If other poets draw more than one fool or coxcomb, there is the same resemblance in them, as in that painter's draughts who was happy only at forming a rose; you find them all younger brothers of the same family, and all of them have a pretence to give the same crest: but Shakspeare's clowns and fops come all of a different house; they are no farther allied to one another than as man to man, members of the same species; but as different in features and lineaments of character, as we are from one another in face or complexion. But I am unawares launching into his character as a writer, before I have said what I intended of him as a private member of the republick.

Mr. Rowe has very justly observed, that people are fond of discovering any little personal story of the great men of antiquity; and that the common accidents of their lives naturally become the subject of our critical inquiries: that however trifling such a curiosity at the first view may appear, yet, as for what relates to men

of letters, the knowledge of an author may, perhaps, sometimes conduce to the better understanding his works; and, indeed, this author's works, from the bad treatment he has met with from copyists and editors, have so long wanted a comment, that one would zealously embrace every method of information that could contribute to recover them from the injuries with which they have so long lain overwhelmed.

It is certain, that if we have first admired the man in his writings, his case is so circumstanced, that we must naturally admire the writings in the man: that if we go back to take a view of his education, and the employment in life which fortune had cut out for him, we shall retain the stronger ideas of his extensive genius.

His father, we are told, was a considerable dealer in wool; but having no fewer than ten children, of whom our Shakspeare was the eldest, the best education he could afford him was no better than to qualify him for his own business and employment. I cannot affirm with any certainty how long his father lived; but I take him to be the same Mr. John Shakspeare who was living in the year 1599, and who then, in honour of his son, took out an extract of his family-arms from the herald's office; by which it appears, that he had been officer and bailiff of Stratford upon Avon in Warwickshire; and that he enjoyed some hereditary lands and tenements, the reward of his great grandfather's faithful and approved service to king Henry VII.

Be this as it will, our Shakspeare, it seems, was bred for some time at a free-school; the very free-school, I presume, founded at Stratford: where, we are told, he acquired what Latin he was master of: but that his father being obliged, through narrowness of circumstance, to withdraw him too soon from thence, he was thereby unhappily prevented from making any proficiency in the dead languages; a point that will deserve some little discussion in the sequel of this dissertation.

How long he continued in his father's way of business, either as an assistant to him, or on his own proper account, no notices are left to inform us: nor have I been able to learn precisely at what period of life he quitted his native Stratford, and began his acquaintance with London and the *stage*.

In order to settle in the world after a family-manner, he thought fit, Mr. Rowe acquaints us, to marry while he was yet very young. It is certain, he did so: for by the monument in Stratford-church, erected to the memory of his daughter Susanna, the wife of John Hall, gentleman, it appears, that she died on the 2d of July, in the year 1649, aged 66. So that she was born in 1583, when her father could not be full 19 years old; who was himself born in the year 1564. Nor was she his eldest child, for he had another daughter, Judith, who was born before her*, and who was

* This is a mistake. Susanna was the poet's eldest daughter. See the extracts from the register-book of the parish of Stratford, in one of the following pages.

STEEVENS.

married

married to one Mr. Thomas Quiney. So that Shakspeare must have entered into wedlock by that time he was turned of seventeen years.

Whether the force of inclination merely, or some concurring circumstances of convenience in the match, prompted him to marry so early, is not easy to be determined at this distance ; but, it is probable, a view of interest might partly sway his conduct in this point : for he married the daughter of one Hathaway, a substantial yeoman in his neighbourhood, and she had the start of him in age no less than eight years. She survived him, notwithstanding, seven seasons, and died that very year in which the *players* published the first edition of his works in *folio*, Anno Dom. 1623, at the age of 67 years, as we likewise learn from her monument in Stratford church.

How long he continued in this kind of settlement, upon his own native spot, is not more easily to be determined. But if the tradition be true, of that extravagance which forced him both to quit his country and way of living, to wit, his being engaged, with a knot of young deer-stealers, to rob the park of Sir Thomas Lucy, of Cherlecot, near Stratford, the enterprize savours so much of youth and levity, we may reasonably suppose it was before he could write full man. Besides, considering he has left us six-and-thirty plays at least, avowed to be genuine ; and considering too that he had retired from the stage, to spend the latter part of his days at his own native Stratford ; the interval of time necessarily required for the finishing so many

many dramattick pieces, obliges us to suppose he threw himself very early upon the play-house. And as he could, probably, contract no acquaintance with the drama, while he was driving on the affair of wool at home; some time must be lost, even after he had commenced player, before he could attain knowledge enough in the science to qualify himself for turning author.

It has been observed by Mr. Rowe, that, amongst other extravagances, which our author has given to his Sir John Falstaff, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he has made him a deer-stealer; and, that he might at the same time remember his Warwickshire prosecutor, under the name of Justice Shallow, he has given him very near the same coat of arms, which Dugdale, in his *Antiquities* of that county, describes for a family there. There are two coats, I observe, in Dugdale, where three silver fishes are borne in the name of Lucy; and another coat, to the monument of Thomas Lucy, son of Sir William Lucy, in which are quartered, in four several divisions, twelve little fishes, three in each division, probably *Luces*. This very coat, indeed, seems alluded to in Shallow's giving the *dozen* white *Luces*, and in Slender saying *he may quarter*. When I consider the exceeding candour and good-nature of our author (which inclined all the gentler part of the world to love him, as the power of his wit obliged the men of the most delicate knowledge and polite learning to admire him); and that he should throw this humourous piece of satire at his prosecutor,
at

at least twenty years after the provocation given; I am confidently persuaded it must be owing to an unforgiving rancour on the prosecutor's side: and, if this was the case, it were pity but the disgrace of such an inveteracy should remain as a lasting reproach, and Shallow stand as a mark of ridicule to stigmatize his malice.

It is said, our author spent some years before his death in ease, retirement, and the conversation of his friends, at his native Stratford. I could never pick up any certain intelligence, when he relinquished the stage. I know, it has been mistakenly thought by some, that Spenser's *Thalia*, in his *Tears of his Muses*, where she laments the loss of her Willy in the comick scene, has been applied to our author's quitting the stage. But Spenser himself, it is well known, quitted the stage of life in the year 1598; and, five years after this, we find Shakspeare's name among the actors in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus*, which first made its appearance in the year 1603. Nor, surely, could he then have any thoughts of retiring, since that very year a licence under the privy-seal was granted by K. James I. to him and Fletcher, Burbage, Phillippes, Heminge, Condell, &c. authorizing them to exercise the art of playing comedies, tragedies, &c. as well at their usual house called *The Globe*, on the other side of the water, as in any other parts of the kingdom, during his majesty's pleasure (a copy of which licence is preserved in *Rymer's Fœdera*). Again, it is certain, that Shakspeare did not exhibit his *Macbeth* till after the Union was brought about, and till after K. James I. had begun

begun to touch for the *evil*: for, it is plain, he has inserted compliments, on both those accounts, upon his royal master in that tragedy. Nor, indeed, could the number of the dramattick pieces, he produced, admit of his retiring near so early as that period. So that what Spenser there says, if it relate at all to Shakspeare, must hint at some occasional recess he made for a time upon a disgust taken: or the Willy, there mentioned, must relate to some other favourite poet. I believe, we may safely determine, that he had not quitted in the year 1610. For, in his *Tempest*, our author makes mention of the Bermuda islands, which were unknown to the English, till, in 1609, Sir John Summers made a voyage to North-America, and discovered them, and afterwards invited some of his countrymen to settle a plantation there. That he became the private gentleman, at least three years before his decease, is pretty obvious from another circumstance: I mean, from that remarkable and well-known story, which Mr. Rowe has given us of our author's intimacy with Mr. John Combe, an old gentleman noted thereabouts for his wealth and usury; and upon whom Shakspeare made the following facetious epitaph:

*Ten in the hundred lies here ingrav'd,
'Tis a hundred to ten his soul is not sav'd;
If any man ask, who lies in this tomb,
Oh! oh! quoth the devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe.*

This

This sarcastical piece of wit was, at the gentleman's own request, thrown out extemporally in his company. And this Mr. John Combe I take to be the same, who, by Dugdale in his *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, is said to have died in the year 1614 *, and for whom, at the upper end of the choir of the Guild of the Holy Cross at Stratford, a fair monument is erected, having a statue thereon cut in alabaster, and in a gown, with this epitaph. “ Here lieth interred the body of John
 “ Combe, esq. who died the 10th of July, 1614,
 “ who bequeathed several annual charities to the pa-
 “ rish of Stratford, and 100l. to be lent to fifteen poor
 “ tradesmen from three years to three years, changing
 “ the parties every third year, at the rate of fifty
 “ shillings *per annum*, the increase to be distributed to
 “ the alms-poor there.”—The donation has all the air of a rich and sagacious usurer.

Shakspeare himself did not survive Mr. Combe long, for he died in the year 1616, the 53d of his age. He lies buried on the north side of the chancel in the great church at Stratford; where a monument, decent enough for the time, is erected to him, and placed against the wall. He is represented under an arch in a sitting posture, a cushion spread before him, with a pen in his right hand, and his left rested on a scrawl of

* By Mr. Combe's Will, which is now in the Prerogative-Office in London, Shakspeare had a legacy of five pounds bequeathed to him. The Will is without any date.
 paper.

paper. The Latin distich, which is placed under the cushion, has been given us by Mr. Pope, or his graver, in this manner :

*INGENIO Pylium, genio Socratem, arte Maronem,
Terra tegit, populus mæret, Olympus habet.*

I confess, I do not conceive the difference betwixt *ingenio* and *genio* in the first verse. They seem to me entirely synonymous terms ; nor was the Pylian sage, Nestor, celebrated for his ingenuity, but for an experience and judgment owing to his long age. Dugdale, in his *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, has copied this distich with a distinction which Mr. Rowe has followed, and which certainly restores us the true meaning of the epitaph :

JUDICIO Pylium, genio Socratem, &c.*

In

* The first syllable in *Socratem* is here made short, which cannot be allowed. Perhaps we should read *Sophoclem*. Shakspeare is then appositely compared with a dramattick author among the ancients: but still it should be remembered that the elogium is lessened while the metre is reformed ; and it is well known that some of our early writers of Latin poetry were uncommonly negligent in their prosody, especially in proper names. The thought of this distich, as Mr. Tollet observes, might have been taken from the *Fairy Queene* of Spenser, b. ii. c. 9. st. 48, and c. 10. st. 3.

D

To

In 1614, the greatest part of the town of Stratford was consumed by fire; but our Shakspeare's house, among some others, escaped the flames. This house was first built by Sir Hugh Clopton, a younger brother of an ancient family in that neighbourhood, who took their name from the manor of Clopton. Sir Hugh was Sheriff of London in the reign of Richard III. and lord-mayor in the reign of king Henry VII. To this gentleman the town of Stratford is indebted for the fine stone-bridge, consisting of fourteen arches, which, at an extraordinary expence, he built over the Avon,

To this Latin inscription on Shakspeare should be added the lines which are found underneath it on his monument:

Stay, passenger, why dost thou go so fast?
Read, if thou canst, whom envious death hath plac'd
Within this monument; Shakspeare, with whom
Quick nature dy'd, whose name doth deck the tomb
Far more than cost; since all that he hath writ
Leaves living art but page to serve his wit.

Again, near the wall on which this monument is erected, is a plain free-stone, under which his body is buried, with another epitaph, expressed in the following uncouth mixture of small and capital letters:

Good friend for Iesus SAKE forbear
To digg TE Dust EncloAsed HERe
Blese be TE Man T spares TEs Stones
And curst be He T moves my bones. STEEVENS.

together

together with a causeway running at the west-end thereof; as also for rebuilding the chapel adjoining to his house, and the cross-aisle in the church there. It is remarkable of him, that, though he lived and died a bachelor, among the other extensive charities which he left both to the city of London and town of Stratford, he bequeathed considerable legacies for the marriage of poor maidens of good name and fame both in London and at Stratford. Notwithstanding which large donations in his life, and bequests at his death, as he had purchased the manor of Clopton, and all the estate of the family, so he left the same again to his elder brother's son with a very great addition (a proof how well beneficence and œconomy may walk hand in hand in wise families): good part of which estate is yet in the possession of Edward Clopton, esq. and Sir Hugh Clopton, knt. lineally descended from the elder brother of the first Sir Hugh, who particularly bequeathed to his nephew, by his will, his house, by the name of his *Great House* in Stratford.

The estate had now been sold out of the Clopton family for above a century, at the time when Shakspeare became the purchaser; who, having repaired and modelled it to his own mind, changed the name to *New-Place*, which the mansion-house, since erected upon the same spot, at this day retains. The house and lands, which attended it, continued in Shakspeare's descendants to the time of the *Restoration*; when they were repurchased by the Clopton family, and the mansion now belongs to Sir Hugh Clopton, knt. To

the favour of this worthy gentleman I owe the knowledge of one particular, in honour of our poet's once dwelling-house, of which, I presume, Mr. Rowe never was apprized. When the civil war raged in England, and king Charles the First's queen was driven by the necessity of affairs to make a recess in Warwickshire, she kept her court for three weeks in New-Place. We may reasonably suppose it then the best private house in the town; and her majesty preferred it to the college, which was in the possession of the Combe family, who did not so strongly favour the king's party.

How much our author employed himself in poetry, after his retirement from the stage, does not so evidently appear: very few posthumous sketches of his pen have been recovered to ascertain that point. We have been told, indeed, in print*, but not till very lately, that two large chests full of this great man's loose papers and manuscripts, in the hands of an ignorant baker of Warwick (who married one of the descendants from our Shakspeare), were carelessly scattered and thrown about as garret-lumber and litter, to the particular knowledge of the late Sir William Bishop, till they were all consumed in the general fire and destruction of that town. I cannot help being a little apt to distrust the authority of this tradition, because his wife survived him seven years; and, as his

* See an answer to Mr. Pope's Preface to Shakspeare, by a Strolling Player, 8vo. 1729, p. 45.

REED.

favourite

favourite daughter Susanna survived her twenty-six years, it is very improbable they should suffer such a treasure to be removed, and translated into a remoter branch of the family, without a scrutiny first made into the value of it. This, I say, inclines me to distrust the authority of the relation: but, notwithstanding such an apparent improbability, if we really lost such a treasure, by whatever fatality or caprice of fortune they came into such ignorant and neglectful hands, I agree with the *relater*, the misfortune is wholly irreparable.

To these particulars, which regard his person and private life, some few more are to be gleaned from Mr. Rowe's *Account of his Life and Writings*: let us now take a short view of him in his publick capacity as a *writer*: and, from thence, the transition will be easy to the *state* in which his *writings* have been handed down to us.

No age, perhaps, can produce an author more various from himself, than Shakspeare has been universally acknowledged to be. The diversity in style, and other parts of composition, so obvious in him, is as variously to be accounted for. His education, we find, was at best but begun: and he started early into a science from the force of genius, unequally assisted by acquired improvements. His fire, spirit, and exuberance of imagination, gave an impetuosity to his pen: his ideas flowed from him in a stream rapid, but not turbulent; copious, but not ever overbearing its

shores. The ease and sweetness of his temper might not a little contribute to his facility in writing ; as his employment, as a *player*, gave him an advantage and habit of fancying himself the very character he meant to delineate. He used the helps of his function in forming himself to create and express that *sublime*, which other actors can only copy, and throw out, in action and graceful attitude. But, *Nullum sine veniâ placuit ingenium*, says Seneca. The genius, that gives us the greatest pleasure, sometimes stands in need of our indulgence. Whenever this happens with regard to Shakspeare, I would willingly impute it to a vice of *his times*. We see complaisance enough, in our days, paid to a *bad taste*. So that his *clinch*es, *false wit*, and descending beneath himself, may have proceeded from a deference paid to the then *reigning barbarism*.

I have not thought it out of my province, whenever occasion offered, to take notice of some of our poet's grand touches of nature ; some, that do not appear sufficiently such, but in which he seems the most deeply instructed ; and to which, no doubt, he has so much owed that happy preservation of his *characters*, for which he is justly celebrated. Great geniuses, like his, naturally unambitious, are satisfied to conceal their art in these points. It is the foible of your worser poets to make a parade and ostentation of that little science they have ; and to throw it out in the most ambitious colours. And whenever a writer of this class shall attempt to copy these artful concealments of our author, and shall either think them easy,
or

or practised by a writer for his ease, he will soon be convinced of his mistake by the difficulty of reaching the imitation of them.

*Speret idem, sudet multùm, frustràque laboret,
Ausus idem.*———

Indeed, to point out and exclaim upon all the beauties of Shakspeare, as they come singly in review, would be as insipid, as endless; as tedious, as unnecessary: but the explanation of those beauties that are less obvious to common readers, and whose illustration depends on the rules of just criticism, and an exact knowledge of human life, should deservedly have a share in a general critique upon the author. But to pass over at once to another subject:——

It has been allowed on all hands, how far our author was indebted to *nature*; it is not so well agreed, how much he owed to *languages* and acquired *learning*. The decisions on this subject were certainly set on foot by the hint from Ben Jonson, that he had small Latin, and less Greek: and from this tradition, as it were, Mr. Rowe has thought fit peremptorily to declare, that,
 “ It is without controversy, he had no knowledge of
 “ the writings of the ancient poets, for that in his
 “ works we find no traces of any thing which looks
 “ like an imitation of the ancients. For the delicacy
 “ of his taste” (continues he) and the natural bent of
 “ his own great genius (equal, if not superior, to
 “ some of the best of theirs), would certainly have
 “ led

“ led him to read and study them with so much pleasure, that some of their fine images would naturally have insinuated themselves into, and been mixed with, his own writings: and so his not copying, at least, something from them, may be an argument of his never having read them.” I shall leave it to the determination of my learned readers, from the numerous passages which I have occasionally quoted in my notes, in which our poet seems closely to have imitated the classicks, whether Mr. Rowe’s assertion be so absolutely to be depended on. The result of the controversy must certainly, either way, terminate to our author’s honour: how happily he could imitate them, if that point be allowed; or how gloriously he could think like them, without owing any thing to imitation.

Though I should be very unwilling to allow Shakspeare so poor a scholar, as many have laboured to represent him, yet I shall be very cautious of declaring too positively on the other side of the question; that is with regard to my opinion of his knowledge in the dead languages. And therefore the passages, that I occasionally quote from the classicks, shall not be urged as proofs that he knowingly imitated those originals; but brought to shew how happily he has expressed himself upon the same topicks. A very learned critick of our own nation has declared, that a sameness of thought, and sameness of expression too, in two writers of a different age, can hardly happen, without a violent suspicion of the latter copying from his

his predecessor. I shall not therefore run any great risque of a censure, though I should venture to hint, that the resemblances in thought and expression of our author and an ancient (which we should allow to be imitation in the one, whose learning was not questioned), may sometimes take its rise from strength of memory, and those impressions which he owed to the school. And if we may allow a possibility of this, considering that, when he quitted the school, he gave into his father's profession and way of living, and had, it is likely, but a slender library of classical learning; and considering what a number of translations, romances, and legends, started about his time, and a little before (most of which, it is very evident, he read); I think it may easily be reconciled, why he rather schemed his *plots* and *characters* from these more latter informations, than went back to those fountains, for which he might entertain a sincere veneration, but to which he could not have so ready a recourse.

In touching on another part of his learning, as it related to the knowledge of *history* and *books*, I shall advance something, that, at first sight, will very much wear the appearance of a paradox. For I shall find it no hard matter to prove, that, from the grossest blunders in history, we are not to infer his real ignorance of it; nor from a greater use of Latin words, than ever any other English author used, must we infer his intimate acquaintance with that language.

A reader

A reader of taste may easily observe, that though Shakspeare, almost in every scene of his historical plays, commits the grossest offences against chronology, history, and ancient politicks; yet this was not through ignorance, as is generally supposed, but through the too powerful blaze of his imagination, which, when once raised, made all acquired knowledge vanish and disappear before it. But this licence in him, as I have said, must not be imputed to ignorance; since as often we may find him, when occasion serves, reasoning up to the truth of history; and throwing out sentiments as justly adapted to the circumstances of his subject, as to the dignity of his characters, or dictates of nature in general.

Then to come to his knowledge of the Latin tongue, it is certain, there is a surprising effusion of Latin words made English, far more than in any one English author I have seen; but we must be cautious to imagine, this was of his own doing. For the English tongue, in his age, began extremely to suffer by an inundation of Latin: and this, to be sure, was occasioned by the pedantry of those two monarchs, Elizabeth and James, both great Latinists. For it is not to be wondered at, if both the court and schools, equal flatterers of power, should adapt themselves to the royal taste.

But now I am touching on the question (which has been so frequently agitated, yet so entirely undecided) of his learning and acquaintance with the languages; an additional word or two naturally falls in here upon the
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the genius of our author, as compared with that of Jonson his contemporary. They are confessedly the greatest writers our nation could ever boast of in the *drama*. The first, we say, owed all to his prodigious natural genius; and the other a great deal to his art and learning. This, if attended to, will explain a very remarkable appearance in their writings. Besides those wonderful master-pieces of art and genius, which each has given us, they are the authors of other works very unworthy of them; but with this difference, that in Jonson's bad pieces we do not discover one single trace of the author of *The Fox* and *Alchymist*; but, in the wild extravagant notes of Shakspeare, you every now and then encounter strains that recognize the divine composer. This difference may be thus accounted for: Jonson, as we said before, owing all his excellence to his art, by which he sometimes strained himself to an uncommon pitch, when at other times he unbent and played with his subject, having nothing then to support him, it is no wonder that he wrote so far beneath himself. But Shakspeare, indebted more largely to nature, than the other to acquired talents, in his most negligent hours could never so totally divest himself of his genius, but that it would frequently break out with astonishing force and splendour.

As I have never proposed to dilate farther on the character of my author, than was necessary to explain the nature and use of this edition, I shall proceed to consider him as a genius in possession of an everlasting name. And how great that merit must be, which
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could gain it against all the disadvantages of the horrid condition in which he has hitherto appeared! Had Homer, or any other admired author, first started into publick so maimed and deformed, we cannot determine whether they had not sunk for ever under the ignominy of such an ill-appearance. The mangled condition of Shakspeare has been acknowledged by Mr. Rowe, who published him indeed, but neither corrected his text, nor collated the old copies. This gentleman had abilities, and sufficient knowledge of his author, had but his industry been equal to his talents. The same mangled condition has been acknowledged too by Mr. Pope, who published him likewise, pretended to have collated the old copies, and yet seldom has corrected the text but to its injury. I congratulate with the *manes* of our poet, that this gentleman has been sparing in *indulging his private sense*, as he phrases it; for he, who tampers with an author, whom he does not understand, must do it at the expence of his subject. I have made it evident throughout my remarks, that he has frequently inflicted a wound where he intended a cure. He has acted with regard to our author, as an editor, whom LIPSIVS mentions, did with regard to MARTIAL; *Inventus est nescio quis Popa, qui non vitia ejus, sed ipsum excidet*. He has attacked him like an unhandy *slaughterman*; and not lopped off the *errors*, but the *poet*.

When this is found to be fact, how absurd must appear the praises of such an editor? It seems a moot point, whether Mr. Pope has done most injury to
Shakspeare,

Shakspeare, as his editor and encomiast ; or Mr. Rymer done him service, as his rival and censurer. They have both shewn themselves in an equal *impuissance* of suspecting or amending the corrupted passages : and though it be neither prudence to censure or commend what one does not understand ; yet, if a man must do one when he plays the critick, the latter is the more ridiculous office ; and by that Shakspeare suffers most. For the natural veneration which we have for him makes us apt to swallow whatever is given us as *his*, and set off with encomiums ; and hence we quit all suspicions of depravity : on the contrary, the censure of so divine an author sets us upon his defence ; and this produces an exact scrutiny and examination, which ends in finding out and discriminating the true from the spurious.

It is not with any secret pleasure, that I so frequently animadvert on Mr. Pope as a critick ; but there are provocations, which a man can never quite forget. His libels have been thrown out with so much inveteracy, that not to dispute whether they *should* come from a *Christian*, they leave it a question whether they *could* come from a *man*. I should be loth to doubt, as Quintus Serenus did in a like case :

*Sive homo, seu similis turpissima bestia nobis
Vulnera dente dedit.*

The indignation, perhaps, for being represented a *blockhead*, may be as strong in us, as it is in the ladies

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for a reflection on their *beauties*. It is certain, I am indebted to him for some *flagrant civilities*; and I shall willingly devote a part of my life to the honest endeavour of quitting scores: with this exception, however, that I will not return those civilities in his *peculiar* strain, but confine myself, at least, to the limits of *common decency*. I shall ever think it better to want *wit*, than to want *humanity*: and impartial posterity may, perhaps, be of my opinion.

But to return to my subject, which now calls upon me to inquire into those causes, to which the deprivations of my author originally may be assigned; we are to consider him as a writer, of whom no authentick manuscript was left extant; as a writer, whose pieces were dispersedly performed on the several *stages* then in being. And it was the custom of those days for the poets to take a price of the *players* for the pieces they from time to time furnished; and thereupon it was supposed they had no farther right to print them without the consent of the *players*. As it was the interest of the *companies* to keep their plays unpublished, when any one succeeded, there was a contest betwixt the curiosity of the town, who demanded to see it in print, and the policy of the *stagers*, who wished to secrete it within their own walls. Hence many pieces were taken down in short-hand, and imperfectly copied by ear from a *representation*: others were printed from piecemeal parts surreptitiously obtained from the theatres, incorrect, and without the poet's knowledge. To some of these causes we owe the train of blemishes,
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that deform those pieces which stole singly into the world in our author's life-time.

There are still other reasons, which may be supposed to have affected the whole set. When the *players* took upon them to publish his works entire, every theatre was ransacked to supply the copy; and *parts* collected, which had gone through as many changes as performers, either from mutilations or additions made to them. Hence we derive many chasms and incoherences in the sense and matter. Scenes were frequently transposed, and shuffled out of their true place, to humour the caprice, or supposed convenience, of some particular actor. Hence much confusion and impropriety has attended and embarrassed the business and fable. To these obvious causes of corruption it must be added, that our author has lain under the disadvantage of having his errors propagated and multiplied by time: because, for near a century, his works were published from the faulty copies, without the assistance of any intelligent editor: which has been the case likewise of many a *classick* writer.

The nature of any distemper once found, has generally been the immediate step to a cure. Shakspeare's case has in a great measure resembled that of a corrupt *classick*; and, consequently, the method of cure was likewise to bear a resemblance. By what means, and with what success, this cure has been effected on ancient writers, is too well known, and needs no formal illustration. The reputation, consequent on tasks of that nature, invited me to attempt the method here;

with this view, the hopes of restoring to the publick their greatest poet in his original purity, after having so long lain in a condition that was a disgrace to common sense. To this end I have ventured on a labour, that is the first assay of the kind on any modern author whatsoever. For the late edition of Milton, by the learned Dr. Bentley, is, in the main, a performance of another species. It is plain, it was the intention of that great man rather to correct and pare off the excrescencies of the *Paradise Lost*, in the manner that Tucca and Varius were employed to criticise the *Æneis* of Virgil, than to restore corrupted passages. Hence, therefore, may be seen either the iniquity or ignorance of his censurers, who, from some expressions, would make us believe the *doctor* every where gives us his corrections as the original text of the author; whereas the chief turn of his criticism is plainly to shew the world, that, if Milton did not write as he would have him, he ought to have wrote so.

I thought proper to premise this observation to the readers, as it will shew that the critique on Shakspeare is of a quite different kind. His genuine text is for the most part religiously adhered to, and the numerous faults and blemishes, purely his own, are left as they were found. Nothing is altered, but what, by the clearest reasoning, can be proved a corruption of the true text; and the alteration, a real restoration of the genuine reading. Nay, so strictly have I strove to give the true reading, though sometimes not to the advantage

vantage of my author, that I have been ridiculously ridiculed for it by those, who either were iniquitously for turning every thing to my disadvantage; or else were totally ignorant of the true duty of an editor.

The science of criticism, as far as it affects an editor, seems to be reduced to these three classes; the emendation of corrupt passages; the explanation of obscure and difficult ones; and an inquiry into the beauties and defects of composition. This work is principally confined to the two former parts: though there are some specimens interspersed of the latter kind, as several of the emendations were best supported, and several of the difficulties best explained, by taking notice of the beauties and defects of the composition peculiar to this immortal poet. But this was but occasional, and for the sake only of perfecting the two other parts, which were the proper objects of the editor's labour; the third lies open for every willing undertaker: and I shall be pleased to see it the employment of a masterly pen.

It must necessarily happen, as I have formerly observed, that where the assistance of manuscripts is wanting to set an author's meaning right, and rescue him from those errors which have been transmitted down through a series of incorrect editions, and a long intervention of time, many passages must be desperate, and past a cure; and their true sense irretrievable either to care or the sagacity of conjecture. But is there any reason therefore to say, that because all can-

not be retrieved, all ought to be left desperate? We should shew very little honesty, or wisdom, to play the tyrants with an author's text; to raze, alter, innovate, and overturn, at all adventures, and to the utter detriment of his sense and meaning: but to be so very reserved and cautious, as to interpose no relief or conjecture, where it manifestly labours and cries out for assistance, seems, on the other hand, an indolent absurdity.

As there are very few pages in Shakspeare, upon which some suspicions of depravity do not reasonably arise; I have thought it my duty, in the first place, by a diligent and laborious collation, to take in the assistances of all the older copies.

In his *historical plays*, whenever our English chronicles, and in his tragedies, when Greek or Roman story could give any light, no pains have been omitted to set passages right, by comparing my author with his originals; for, as I have frequently observed, he was a close and accurate copier wherever his *fable* was founded on *history*.

Wherever the author's sense is clear and discoverable (though, perchance, low and trivial), I have not by any innovation tampered with his text, out of an ostentation of endeavouring to make him speak better than the old copies have done.

Where, through all the former editions, a passage has laboured under flat nonsense and invincible darkness, if, by the addition or alteration of a letter or two, or a transposition in the pointing, I have restored
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to him both sense and sentiment ; such corrections, I am persuaded, will need no indulgence.

And whenever I have taken a greater latitude and liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my corrections and conjectures by parallel passages and authorities from himself, the surest means of expounding any author whatsoever. *Cette voie d'interpréter un auteur par lui-même, est plus sûre que tous les commentaires*, says a very learned French critick.

As to my *notes* (from which the common and learned readers of our author, I hope, will derive some satisfaction), I have endeavoured to give them a variety in some proportion to their number. Wherever I have ventured at an emendation, a *note* is constantly subjoined to justify and assert the reason of it. Where I only offer a conjecture, and do not disturb the text, I fairly set forth my grounds for such conjecture, and submit it to judgment. Some remarks are spent in explaining passages, where the wit or satire depends on an obscure point of history : others, where allusions are to divinity, philosophy, or other branches of science. Some are added, to shew where there is a suspicion of our author having borrowed from the ancients : others, to shew where he is rallying his contemporaries ; or where he himself is rallied by them. And some are necessarily thrown in, to explain an obscure and obsolete *term, phrase, or idea*. I once intended to have added a complete and copious *glossary* ; but as I have been importuned, and am prepared to give a correct edition of our author's POEMS (in which
many

many terms occur that are not to be met with in his *plays*), I thought a *glossary* to all Shakspeare's works more proper to attend that volume.

In reforming an infinite number of passages in the *pointing*, where the sense was before quite lost, I have frequently subjoined notes, to shew the *depraved*, and to prove the *reformed*, pointing: a part of labour in this work which I could very willingly have spared myself. May it not be objected, why then have you burdened us with these notes? The answer is obvious, and, if I mistake not, very material. Without such notes, these passages in subsequent editions would be liable, through the ignorance of printers and correctors, to fall into the old confusion: whereas, a note on every one hinders all possible return to depravity: and for ever secures them in a state of purity and integrity not to be lost or forfeited.

Again, as some notes have been necessary to point out the detection of the corrupted text, and establish the restoration of the genuine readings; some others have been as necessary for the explanation of passages obscure and difficult. To understand the necessity and use of this part of my task, some particulars of my author's character are previously to be explained. There are *obscurities* in him, which are common to him with all poets of the same species; there are others, the issue of the times he lived in; and there are others, again, peculiar to himself. The nature of comick poetry being entirely satirical, it busies itself more in exposing what we call caprice and humour, than vices cognizable

cognizable to the laws. The English, from the happiness of a free constitution, and a turn of mind peculiarly speculative and inquisitive, are observed to produce more *humourists*, and a greater variety of original *characters*, than any other people whatsoever: and these owing their immediate birth to the peculiar genius of each age, an infinite number of things alluded to, glanced at, and exposed, must needs become obscure, as the *characters* themselves are antiquated and disused. An editor, therefore, should be well versed in the history and manners of his author's age, if he aims at doing him a service in this respect.

Besides, *wit* lying mostly in the assemblage of *ideas*, and in putting those together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance, or congruity, to make up pleasant pictures, and agreeable visions in the fancy; the writer, who aims at wit, must of course range far and wide for materials. Now the age in which Shakspeare lived, having, above all others, a wonderful affection to appear learned, they declined vulgar images, such as are immediately fetched from nature, and ranged through the circle of the sciences, to fetch their ideas from thence. But as the resemblances of such ideas to the subject must necessarily lie very much out of the common way, and every piece of wit appear a riddle to the vulgar; this, that should have taught them the forced, quaint, unnatural tract they were in (and induce them to follow a more natural one), was the very thing that kept them attached to it. The ostentatious affectation of abstruse learning,
peculiar

peculiar to that time, the love that men naturally have to every thing that looks like mystery, fixed them down to the habit of obscurity. Thus became the poetry of DONNE (though the wittiest man of that age), nothing but a continued heap of riddles. And our Shakspeare, with all his easy nature about him, for want of the knowledge of the true rules of art, falls frequently into this vicious manner.

The third species of *obscurities* which deform our author, as the effects of his own genius and character, are those that proceed from his peculiar manner of *thinking*, and as peculiar a manner of *clothing* those *thoughts*. With regard to his *thinking*, it is certain, that he had a general knowledge of all the sciences: but his acquaintance was rather that of a traveller than a native. Nothing in philosophy was unknown to him; but every thing in it had the grace and force of novelty. And as novelty is one main source of admiration, we are not to wonder that he has perpetual allusions to the most recondite parts of the sciences: and this was done not so much out of affectation, as the effect of admiration begot by novelty. Then, as to his *stile* and *diction*, we may much more justly apply to SHAKS-PERE, what a celebrated writer said of MILTON: *Our language sunk under him, and was unequal to that greatness of soul which furnished him with such glorious conceptions.* He therefore frequently uses old words, to give his diction an air of solemnity; as he coins others, to express the novelty and variety of his ideas.

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Upon every distinct species of these *obscurities*, I have thought it my province to employ a note for the service of my author, and the entertainment of my readers. A few transient remarks too I have not scrupled to intermix, upon the poet's *negligences* and *omissions* in point of art ; but I have done it always in such a manner, as will testify my deference and veneration for the immortal author. Some censurers of Shakspeare, and particularly Mr. Rymer, have taught me to distinguish betwixt the *railer* and *critick*. The outrage of his quotations is so remarkably violent, so pushed beyond all bounds of decency and sober reasoning, that it quite carries over the mark at which it was levelled. Extravagant abuse throws off the edge of the intended disparagement, and turns the madman's weapon into his own bosom. In short, as to Rymer, this is my opinion of him, from his *criticisms* on the *tragedies* of the last age. He writes with great vivacity, and appears to have been a scholar : but as for his knowledge of the art of poetry, I cannot perceive it was any deeper than his acquaintance with Bossu and Dacier, from whom he has transcribed many of his best reflections. The late Mr. Gildon was one attached to Rymer by a similar way of thinking and studies. They were both of that species of criticks who are desirous of displaying their powers rather in finding faults, than in consulting the improvement of the world ; the *hyper-critical* part of the science of *criticism*.

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I had not mentioned the modest liberty I have here and there taken of animadverting on my author; but that I was willing to obviate, in time, the splenetick exaggerations of my adversaries on this head. From past experiments I have reason to be conscious, in what light this attempt may be placed: and that what I call a *modest liberty* will, by a little of their dexterity, be inverted into downright *impudence*. From a hundred mean and dishonest artifices employed to discredit this edition, and to cry down its editor, I have all the grounds in nature to beware of attacks. But though the malice of wit, joined to the smoothness of versification, may furnish some ridicule; fact, I hope, will be able to stand its ground against banter and gaiety.

It has been my fate, it seems, as I thought it my duty, to discover some *anachronisms* in our author; which might have slept in obscurity but for *this Restorer*, as Mr. Pope is pleased affectionately to stile me: as for instance, where Aristotle is mentioned by Hector in *Troilus and Cressida*; and Galen, Cato, and Alexander the Great, in *Coriolanus*. These, in Mr. Pope's opinion, are blunders, which the illiteracy of the first publishers of his works has fathered upon the poet's memory: *it not being at all credible, that these could be the errors of any man who had the least tincture of a school, or the least conversation with such as had*. But I have sufficiently proved, in the course of my *notes*, that such *anachronisms* were the effect of poetick licence, rather than of ignorance in our poet. And if I may be permitted

permitted to ask a modest question by the way, why may I not restore an *anachronism* really made by our author, as well as Mr. Pope take the privilege to fix others upon him, which he never had it in his head to make; as I may venture to affirm he had not, in the instance of Sir Francis Drake, to which I have spoke in the proper place?

But who shall dare make any words about this freedom of Mr. Pope's towards Shakspeare, if it can be proved, that, in his fits of criticism, he makes no more ceremony with good Homer himself? To try, then, a criticism of his own advancing: in the eighth book of the *Odyssey*, where Demodocus sings the episode of the loves of Mars and Venus; and that, upon their being taken in the net by Vulcan,

—————“ *The god of arms*
“ *Must pay the penalty for lawless charms;*”

Mr. Pope is so kind gravely to inform us, “That Homer in this, as in many other places, seems to allude to the laws of Athens, where death was the punishment of adultery.” But how is this significant observation made out? Why, who can possibly object any thing to the contrary?—Does not Pausanias relate, that Draco, the lawgiver to the Athenians, granted impunity to any person that took revenge upon an adulterer? And was it not also the institution of Solon, that if any one took an adulterer in the fact, he might use him as he pleased? These things are very true: and to see what

a good memory, and sound judgment in conjunction, can achieve! though Homer's date is not determined down to a single year, yet it is pretty generally agreed that he lived above three hundred years before Draco and Solon: and that, it seems, has made him *seem* to allude to the very laws, which these two legislators propounded above three hundred years after. If this inference be not something like an *anachronism* or *prolepsis*, I will look once more into my lexicons for the true meaning of the words. It appears to me, that somebody besides Mars and Venus has been caught in a net by this episode: and I could call in other instances, to confirm what treacherous tackle this network is, if not cautiously handled.

How just, notwithstanding, I have been in detecting the *anachronisms* of my author, and in defending him for the use of them, our late editor seems to think, they should rather have slept in obscurity: and the having discovered them is sneered at, as a sort of wrong-headed sagacity.

The numerous corrections which I have made of the poet's text in my *SHAKSPEARE Restored*, and which the publick have been so kind to think well of, are, in the appendix of Mr. Pope's last edition, slightly called *various reasonings, guesses, &c.* He confesses to have inserted as many of them as he judged of any the least advantage to the poet; but says, that the whole amounted to about twenty-five words: and pretends to have annexed a complete list of the rest, which were not worth his embracing. Whoever has read
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my book will, at one glance, see, how in both these points veracity is strained, so an injury might but be done : *Malus, etsi obesse non potest, tamen cogitat.*

Another expedient, to make my work appear of a trifling nature, has been an attempt to depreciate *literal criticism*. To this end, and to pay a servile compliment to Mr. Pope, an *anonymous* writer * has, like a Scotch pedlar in wit, unbraced his pack on the subject. But, that his virulence might not seem to be levelled singly at me, he has done me the honour to join Dr. Bentley in the libel. I was in hopes we should have been both abused with smartness of satire at least, though not with solidity of argument ; that it might have been worth some reply in defence of the science attacked. But I may fairly say of this author, as Falstaff does of Poins ;—*Hang him, baboon ! his wit is as thick as Tewksbury mustard ; there is no more conceit in him, than is in a MALLET.* If it be not prophanation to set the opinion of the divine Longinus against such a scribbler, he tells us expressly, “ That “ to make a judgment upon *words* (and *writings*) “ is the most consummate fruit of much experience. ἡ γὰρ τῶν λόγων κρίσις πολλῆς ἐστὶ πείρας τελευταῖον ἐπιγένημα. Whenever words are depraved, the sense of course must be corrupted ; and thence the reader is betrayed into a false meaning.

* David Mallet. See his poem *Of Verbal Criticism*, vol. i. of his works, 12mo. 1759. REED.

If the Latin and Greek languages have received the greatest advantages imaginable from the labours of the editors and criticks of the two last ages, by whose aid and assistance the grammarians have been enabled to write infinitely better in that art than even the preceding grammarians, who wrote when those tongues flourished as living languages ; I should account it a peculiar happiness, that, by the faint essay I have made in this work, a path might be chalked out for abler hands, by which to derive the same advantages to our own tongue ; a tongue, which, though it wants none of the fundamental qualities of an universal language, yet, as a *noble writer*, says, lisps and stammers as in its cradle ; and has produced little more towards its polishing than complaints of its barbarity.

Having now run through all those points, which I intended should make any part of this dissertation, and having in my *former* edition made publick acknowledgments of the assistances lent me, I shall conclude with a brief account of the methods taken in *this*.

It was thought proper, in order to reduce the bulk and price of the impression, that the notes, wherever they would admit of it, might be abridged : for which reason I have curtailed a great quantity of such, in which explanations were too prolix, or authorities in support of an emendation too numerous : and many I have entirely expunged, which were judged rather verbose and declamatory (and so notes merely of ostentation) than necessary or instructive.

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The few literal errors which had escaped notice, for want of revisals, in the former edition, are here reformed ; and the pointing of innumerable passages is regulated, with all the accuracy I am capable of.

I shall decline making any farther declaration of the pains I have taken upon my author, because it was my duty, as his editor, to publish him with my best care and judgment ; and because I am sensible, all such declarations are construed to be laying a sort of a debt on the publick. As the former edition has been received with much indulgence, I ought to make my acknowledgments to the town for their favourable opinion of it ; and I shall always be proud to think that encouragement the best payment I can hope to receive from my poor studies.

SIR T. HANMER's
P R E F A C E.

WHAT the publick is here to expect is a true and correct edition of Shakspeare's works, cleared from the corruptions with which they have hitherto abounded. One of the great admirers of this incomparable author hath made it the amusement of his leisure hours for many years past to look over his writings with a careful eye, to note the obscurities and absurdities introduced into the text, and, according to the best of his judgment, to restore the genuine sense and purity of it. In this he proposed nothing to himself, but his private satisfaction in making his own copy as perfect as he could ; but, as the emendations multiplied upon his hands, other gentlemen, equally fond of the author, desired to see them, and some were so kind as to give their assistance, by communicating their observations and conjectures upon difficult passages which had occurred to them. Thus, by degrees, the work growing more considerable than was at first expected, they who had the opportunity of looking into it, too partial perhaps in their judgment, thought it

it worth being made publick ; and he, who hath with difficulty yielded to their persuasions, is far from desiring to reflect upon the late editors for the omissions and defects which they left to be supplied by others who should follow them in the same province. On the contrary, he thinks the world much obliged to them for the progress they made in weeding out so great a number of blunders and mistakes as they have done ; and probably he who hath carried on the work might never have thought of such an undertaking, if he had not found a considerable part so done to his hands.

From what causes it proceeded that the works of this author, in the first publication of them, were more injured and abused than perhaps any that ever passed the press, hath been sufficiently explained in the preface to Mr. Pope's edition, and there needs no more to be said upon that subject. This only the reader is desired to bear in mind, that as the corruptions are more numerous, and of a grosser kind than can well be conceived, but by those who have looked nearly into them ; so in the correcting them this rule hath been most strictly observed, not to give a loose to fancy, or indulge a licentious spirit of criticism, as if it were fit for any one to presume to judge what Shakspeare ought to have written, instead of endeavouring to discover truly, and retrieve what he did write : and so great caution hath been used in this respect, that no alterations have been made, but what the sense necessarily required,
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what the measure of the verse often helped to point out, and what the similitude of words, in the false reading and in the true, generally speaking, appeared very well to justify.

Most of those passages are here thrown to the bottom of the page, and rejected as spurious, which were stigmatized as such in Mr. Pope's edition; and it were to be wished that more had then undergone the same sentence. The promoter of the present edition hath ventured to discard but few more upon his own judgment, the most considerable of which is that wretched piece of ribaldry in *King Henry the Fifth*, put into the mouths of the French princess and an old gentlewoman, improper enough as it is all in French, and not intelligible to an English audience, and yet that perhaps is the best thing that can be said of it. There can be no doubt but a great deal more of that low stuff, which disgraces the works of this great author, was foisted in by the players after his death, to please the vulgar audiences by which they subsisted: and though some of the poor witticisms and conceits must be supposed to have fallen from his pen, yet as he hath put them generally into the mouths of low and ignorant people, so it is to be remembered that he wrote for the stage, rude and unpolished as it then was; and the vicious taste of the age must stand condemned for them, since he hath left upon record a signal proof how much he despised them. In his play of *The Merchant of Venice*, a clown is introduced quibbling in a miserable manner; upon which one, who
bears

bears the character of a man of sense, makes the following reflection : *How every fool can play upon a word ! I think the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in none but parrots.* He could hardly have found stronger words to express his indignation at those false pretences to wit then in vogue ; and therefore though such trash is frequently interspersed in his writings, it would be unjust to cast it as an imputation upon his taste and judgment and character as a writer.

There being many words in Shakspeare which are grown out of use and obsolete, and many borrowed from other languages which are not enough naturalized or known among us, a glossary is added at the end of the work, for the explanation of all those terms which have hitherto been so many stumbling-blocks to the generality of readers ; and where there is any obscurity in the text, not arising from the words, but from a reference to some antiquated customs now forgotten, or other causes of that kind, a note is put at the bottom of the page, to clear up the difficulty.

With these several helps, if that rich vein of sense which runs through the works of this author can be retrieved in every part, and brought to appear in its true light, and if it may be hoped, without presumption, that this is here effected ; they who love and admire him will receive a new pleasure, and all probably will be more ready to join in doing him justice, who does great honour to his country as a rare and perhaps a singular genius ; one who hath attained an
high

high degree of perfection in those two great branches of poetry, tragedy and comedy, different as they are in their natures from each other; and who may be said without partiality to have equalled, if not excelled, in both kinds, the best writers of any age or country, who have thought it glory enough to distinguish themselves in either.

Since, therefore, other nations have taken care to dignify the works of their most celebrated poets with the fairest impressions beautified with the ornaments of sculpture, well may our Shakspeare be thought to deserve no less consideration: and as a fresh acknowledgment hath lately been paid to his merit, and a high regard to his name and memory, by erecting his statue at a publick expence; so it is desired that this new edition of his works, which hath cost some attention and care, may be looked upon as another small monument designed and dedicated to his honour.

DR. WARBURTON'S

DR. WARBURTON'S
P R E F A C E.

IT hath been no unusual thing for writers, when dissatisfied with the patronage or judgment of their own times, to appeal to posterity for a fair hearing. Some have even thought fit to apply to it in the first instance ; and to decline acquaintance with the publick, till envy and prejudice had quite subsided. But, of all the trusters to futurity, commend me to the author of the following poems, who not only left it to time to do him justice as it would, but to find him out as it could. For, what between too great attention to his profit as a player, and too little to his reputation as a poet, his works, left to the care of door-keepers and prompters, hardly escape the common fate of those writings, how good soever, which are abandoned to their own fortune, and unprotected by party or cabal. At length, indeed, they struggled into light ; but so disguised and travested, that no classick author, after having run ten secular stages through the blind cloisters of monks and canons, ever came out in half so maimed and mangled a condition. But for a full account of his disorders, I refer the reader to the excellent

cellent discourse in Mr. Pope's Preface, and turn myself to consider the remedies that have been applied to them.

Shakspeare's works, when they escaped the players, did not fall into much better hands when they came amongst printers and booksellers; who, to say the truth, had at first but small encouragement for putting him into a better condition. The stubborn nonsense, with which he was incrusted, occasioned his lying long neglected amongst the common lumber of the stage. And when that resistless splendour, which now shoots all around him, had, by degrees, broke through the shell of those impurities, his dazzled admirers became as suddenly insensible to the extraneous scurf that still stuck upon him, as they had been before to the native beauties that lay under it. So that, as then he was thought not to deserve a cure, he was now supposed not to need any.

His growing eminence, however, required that he should be used with ceremony; and he soon had his appointment of an editor in form. But the bookseller, whose dealing was with wits, having learnt of them, I know not what silly maxim, that *none but a poet should presume to meddle with a poet*, engaged the ingenious Mr. Rowe to undertake this employment. A wit indeed he was; but so utterly unacquainted with the whole business of criticism, that he did not even collate or consult the first editions of the work he undertook to publish; but contented himself with giving us a meagre account of the author's life, interlarded with
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some common-place scraps from his writings. The truth is, Shakspeare's condition was yet but ill understood. The nonsense, now, by consent, received for his own, was held in a kind of reverence for its age and author; and thus it continued till another great *poet* broke the charm, by shewing us, that the higher we went, the less of it was still to be found.

For the proprietors, not discouraged by their first unsuccessful effort, in due time, made a second; and, though they still stuck to their poets, with infinitely more success in their choice of Mr. Pope, who, by the mere force of an uncommon genius, without any particular study or profession of this art, discharged the great parts of it so well, as to make his edition the best foundation for all further improvements. He separated the genuine from the spurious plays; and, with equal judgment, though not always with the same success, attempted to clear the genuine plays from the interpolated scenes: he then consulted the old editions; and, by a careful collation of them, rectified the faulty, and supplied the imperfect reading in a great number of places: and, lastly, in an admirable preface, hath drawn a general, but very lively sketch, of Shakspeare's poetick character; and, in the corrected text, marked out those peculiar strokes of genius which were most proper to support and illustrate that character. Thus far Mr. Pope. And although much more was to be done before Shakspeare could be restored to himself (such as amending the corrupted text where the printed books afford no

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assistance;

assistance ; explaining his licentious phraseology and obscure allusions ; and illustrating the beauties of his poetry) ; yet, with great modesty and prudence, our illustrious editor left this to the critick by profession.

But nothing will give the common reader a better idea of the value of Mr. Pope's edition, than the two attempts which have been since made by Mr. Theobald and Sir Thomas Hanmer in opposition to it ; who, although they concerned themselves only in the *first* of these three parts of criticism, the *restoring the text* (without any conception of the *second*, or venturing even to touch upon the *third*), yet succeeded so very ill in it, that they left their author in ten times a worse condition than they found him. But, as it was my ill fortune to have some accidental connexions with these two gentlemen, it will be incumbent on me to be a little more particular concerning them.

The one was recommended to me as a poor man ; the other as a poor critick : and to each of them, at different times, I communicated a great number of observations, which they managed, as they saw fit, to the relief of their several distresses. As to Mr. Theobald, who wanted money, I allowed him to print what I gave him, for his own advantage ; and he allowed himself in the liberty of taking one part for his own, and sequestering another for the benefit, as I supposed, of some future edition. But, as to the Oxford editor, who wanted nothing but what he might very well be without, the reputation of a critick, I could not so easily forgive him for trafficking with my papers without

out my knowledge ; and, when that project failed, for employing a number of my conjectures in his edition, against my express desire not to have that honour done unto me.

Mr. Theobald was naturally turned to industry and labour. What he read he could transcribe : but, as what he thought, if ever he did think, he could but ill express, so he read on ; and by that means got a character of learning, without risking, to every observer, the imputation of wanting a better talent. By a punctilious collation of the old books, he corrected what was manifestly wrong in the *latter* editions, by what was manifestly right in the *earlier*. And this is his real merit ; and the whole of it. For where the phrase was very obsolete or licentious in the *common* books, or only slightly corrupted in the *other*, he wanted sufficient knowledge of the progress and various stages of the English tongue, as well as acquaintance with the peculiarity of Shakspeare's language, to understand what was right ; nor had he either common judgment to see, or critical sagacity to amend, what was manifestly faulty. Hence he generally exerts his conjectural talent in the wrong place : he tampers with what is found in the *common* books ; and, in the *old* ones, omits all notice of *variations*, the sense of which he did not understand.

How the Oxford editor came to think himself qualified for this office, from which his whole course of life had been so remote, is still more difficult to conceive. For whatever parts he might have, either

of genius or erudition, he was absolutely ignorant of the art of criticism, as well as of the poetry of that time, and the language of his author. And so far from a thought of examining the *first* editions, that he even neglected to compare Mr. Pope's, from which he printed his own, with Mr. Theobald's; whereby he lost the advantage of many fine lines, which the other had recovered from the old quartos. Where he trusts to his own sagacity, in what affects the sense, his conjectures are generally absurd and extravagant, and violating every rule of criticism. Though, in this rage of correcting, he was not absolutely destitute of all *art*. For, having a number of my conjectures before him, he took as many of them as he saw fit, to work upon; and by changing them to something, he thought, synonymous or similar, he made them his own; and so became a critick at a cheap expence. But how well he hath succeeded in this, as likewise in his conjectures, which are properly his own, will be seen in the course of my remarks: though, as he hath declined to give the reasons for his interpolations, he hath not afforded me so fair a hold of him as Mr. Theobald hath done, who was less cautious. But his principal object was to reform his author's numbers; and this, which he hath done, on every occasion, by the insertion or omission of a set of harmless unconcerning expletives, makes up the gross body of his innocent corrections. And so, in spite of that extreme negligence in numbers, which distinguishes the first dramattick writers, he hath tricked up the old bard, from head to foot,
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in all the finical exactness of a modern measurer of syllables.

For the rest, all the corrections which these two editors have made on any *reasonable* foundation, are here admitted into the text; and carefully assigned to their respective authors: a piece of justice which the Oxford editor never did; and which the *other* was not always scrupulous in observing towards me. To conclude with them in a word, they separately possessed those two qualities which, more than any other, have contributed to bring the art of criticism into disrepute, *dulness of apprehension*, and *extravagance of conjecture*.

I am now to give some account of the present undertaking. For as to all those things which have been published under the titles of *Essays, Remarks, Observations, &c. on Shakspeare* (if you except some critical notes on *Macbeth**, given as a specimen of a projected edition, and written, as appears, by a man of parts and genius), the rest are absolutely below a serious notice.

The whole a critick can do for an author, who deserves his service, is to correct the faulty text; to remark the peculiarities of language; to illustrate the obscure allusions; and to explain the beauties and defects of sentiment or composition. And surely, if ever author had a claim to this service, it was our Shakspeare; who, widely excelling in the knowledge

* Published in 1745, by Dr. Johnson. REED.

of human nature, hath given to his infinitely varied pictures of it, such truth of design, such force of drawing, such beauty of colouring, as was hardly ever equalled by any writer, whether his aim was the use, or only the entertainment of mankind. The notes in this edition, therefore, take in the whole compass of criticism.

I. The first sort is employed in restoring the poet's genuine text; but in those places only where it labours with inextricable nonsense. In which, how much soever I may have given scope to critical conjecture, where the old copies failed me, I have indulged nothing to fancy or imagination; but have religiously observed the severe canons of literal criticism, as may be seen from the reasons accompanying every alteration of the common text. Nor would a different conduct have become a critick, whose greatest attention, in this part, was to vindicate the established reading from interpolations occasioned by the fanciful extravagances of others. I once intended to have given the reader a *body of canons*, for literal criticism, drawn out in form; as well such as concern the art in general, as those that arise from the nature and circumstances of our author's works in particular. And this for two reasons. First, to give the *unlearned reader* a just idea, and consequently a better opinion of the art of criticism, now sunk very low in the popular esteem, by the attempts of some who would needs exercise it without either natural or acquired talents; and by the ill success of others, who seemed to have lost both, when

when they came to try them upon English authors. Secondly, To deter the *unlearned writer* from wantonly trifling with an art he is a stranger to, at the expence of his own reputation, and the integrity of the text of established authors. But these uses may be well supplied by what is occasionally said upon the subject, in the course of the following remarks.

II. The second sort of notes consists in an explanation of the author's meaning, when by one or more of these causes it becomes obscure; either from a *licentious use of terms*, or a *hard or ungrammatical construction*; or, lastly, from *far-fetched or quaint allusions*.

1. This licentious use of words is almost peculiar to the language of Shakspeare. To common terms he hath affixed meanings of his own, unauthorized by use, and not to be justified by analogy. And this liberty he hath taken with the noblest parts of speech, such as *mixed modes*; which, as they are most susceptible of abuse, so their abuse most hurts the clearness of the discourse. The criticks (to whom Shakspeare's licence was still as much a secret as his meaning which that licence had obscured) fell into two contrary mistakes; but equally injurious to his reputation and his writings. For some of them, observing a darkness that pervaded his whole expression, have censured him for confusion of ideas and inaccuracy of reasoning. *In the neighing of a horse* (says Rymer), *or in the growling of a mastiff, there is a meaning, there is a lively expression, and, may I say, more humanity than many times in the tragical flights of Shakspeare.* The ignorance
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of which censure is of a piece with its brutality. The truth is, no one thought clearer, or argued more closely, than this immortal bard. But his superiority of genius less needing the intervention of words in the act of thinking, when he came to draw out his contemplations into discourse, he took up (as he was hurried on by the torrent of his matter) with the first words that lay in his way; and if, amongst these, there were two *mixed modes* that had but a principal idea in common, it was enough for him; he regarded them as synonymous, and would use the one for the other without fear or scruple.—Again, there have been others, such as the two last editors, who have fallen into a contrary extreme; and regarded Shakspeare's anomalies (as we may call them) amongst the corruptions of his text; which, therefore, they have cashiered in great numbers, to make room for a jargon of their own. This hath put me to additional trouble; for I had not only their interpolations to throw out again, but the genuine text to replace, and establish in its stead; which, in many cases, could not be done without shewing the peculiar sense of the terms, and explaining the causes which led the poet to so perverse an use of them. I had it once, indeed, in my design, to give a general alphabetick *glossary* of those terms; but as each of them is explained in its proper place, there seemed the less occasion for such an index.

2. The poet's hard and unnatural construction had a different original. This was the effect of mistaken

art and design. The publick taste was in its infancy ; and delighted (as it always does during that state) in the high and turgid ; which leads the writer to disguise a vulgar expression with hard and forced construction, whereby the sentence frequently becomes cloudy and dark. Here his criticks shew their modesty, and leave him to himself. For the arbitrary change of a word doth little towards dispelling an obscurity that ariseth, not from the licentious use of a single term, but from the unnatural arrangement of a whole sentence. And they risked nothing by their silence. For Shakspeare was too clear in fame to be suspected of a want of meaning ; and too high in fashion for any one to own he needed a critick to find it out. Not but, in his best works, we must allow, he is often so natural and flowing, so pure and correct, that he is even a model for style and language.

3. As to his far-fetched and quaint allusions, these are often a cover to common thoughts ; just as his hard construction is to common expression. When they are not so, the explanation of them has this further advantage, that, in clearing the obscurity, you frequently discover some latent conceit not unworthy of his genius.

III. The third and last sort of notes is concerned in a critical explanation of the author's beauties and defects ; but chiefly of his beauties, whether in style, thought, sentiment, character, or composition. An odd humour of finding fault hath long prevailed amongst

amongst the criticks; as if nothing were worth *re-marking*, that did not, at the same time, deserve to be reprov'd. Whereas the publick judgment hath less need to be assisted in what it shall reject, than in what it ought to prize; men being generally more ready at spying faults than in discovering beauties. Nor is the value they set upon a work, a certain proof that they understand it. For it is ever seen, that half a dozen voices of credit give the lead: and if the publick chance to be in good humour, or the author much in their favour, the people are sure to follow. Hence it is, that the true critick hath so frequently attached himself to works of established reputation; not to teach the world to *admire*, which, in those circumstances, to say the truth, they are apt enough to do of themselves; but to teach them how *with reason to admire*: no easy matter, I will assure you, on the subject in question: for though it be very true, as Mr. Pope hath observed, that *Shakspeare is the fairest and fullest subject for criticism*, yet it is not such a sort of criticism as may be raised mechanically on the rules which Dacier, Rapin, and Bossu, have collected from antiquity; and of which such kind of writers as Rymer, Gildon, Dennis, and Oldmixon, have only gathered and chewed the husks: nor, on the other hand, is it to be formed on the plan of those crude and superficial judgments, on books and things, with which a certain celebrated paper * so much abounds;

* The Spectator. REED.

too good indeed to be named with the writers last mentioned, but being unluckily mistaken for a *model*, because it was an *original*, it hath given rise to a deluge of the worst sort of critical jargon; I mean that which looks most like sense. But the kind of criticism here required, is such as judgeth our author by those only laws and principles on which he wrote, NATURE, and COMMON-SENSE.

Our observations, therefore, being thus extensive, will, I presume, enable the reader to form a right judgment of this favourite poet, without drawing out his character, as was once intended, in a continued discourse.

These, such as they are, were among my younger amusements, when, many years ago, I used to turn over these sort of writers to unbend myself from more serious applications: and what certainly the publick at this time of day had never been troubled with, but for the conduct of the two last editors, and the persuasions of dear Mr. Pope; whose memory and name,

—————*semper acerbum,*
Semper honoratum (sic Di voluistis) habebo.

He was desirous I should give a new edition of this poet, as he thought it might contribute to put a stop to a prevailing folly of altering the text of celebrated authors without talents or judgment. And he was willing that *his* edition should be melted down into
mine,

mine, as it would, he said, afford him (so great is the modesty of an ingenuous temper) a fit opportunity of confessing his mistakes *. In memory of our friendship, I have, therefore, made it our joint edition. His admirable preface is here added ; all his notes are given, with his name annexed ; the scenes are divided according to his regulation ; and the most beautiful passages distinguished, as in his book, with inverted commas. In imitation of him, I have done the same by as many others as I thought most deserving of the reader's attention, and have marked them with *double* commas.

If, from all this, Shakspeare or good letters have received any advantage, and the publick any benefit, or entertainment, the thanks are due to the *proprietors*, who have been at the expence of procuring this edition. And I should be unjust to several deserving men of a reputable and useful profession, if I did not, on this occasion, acknowledge the fair dealing I have always found amongst them ; and profess my sense of the unjust prejudice which lies against them ; whereby they have been, hitherto, unable to procure that security for their property, which they see the rest of their fellow-citizens enjoy. A prejudice in part arising from the frequent *piracies* (as they are called) committed by members of their own body. But such kind of members no body is without. And it would be hard that this should be turned to the discredit of the

* See his Letters to me.

honest part of the profession, who suffer more from such injuries than any other men. It hath, in part too, arisen from the clamours of profligate scribblers, ever ready, for a piece of money, to prostitute their bad sense for or against any cause prophane or sacred; or in any scandal, publick or private: these meeting with little encouragement from men of account in the trade (who, even in this enlightened age, are not the very worst judges or rewarders of merit), apply themselves to people of condition; and support their importunities by false complaints against *Book-sellers*.

But I should now, perhaps, rather think of my own apology, than busy myself in the defence of others. I shall have some *Tartuffe* ready, on the first appearance of this edition, to call out again, and tell me, *that I suffer myself to be wholly diverted from my purpose by these matters less suitable to my clerical profession.* “Well, but (says a friend) why not take so candid an intimation in good part? Withdraw yourself again, as you are bid, into the clerical pale: examine the records of sacred and prophane antiquity; and, on them, erect a work to the confusion of infidelity.” Why, I have done all this, and more: and hear now what the same men have said to it. They tell me, *I have wrote to the wrong and injury of religion, and furnished out more handles for unbelievers.* “Oh! now the secret is out; and you may have your pardon, I find, upon easier terms. It is only to write no more.”——Good gentlemen! and shall I not oblige
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them? They would gladly *obstruct* my way to those things which every man, who *endeavours well* in his profession, must needs think he has some claim to, when he sees them given to those who never did *endeavour*; at the same time that they would *deter* me from taking those advantages which letters enable me to procure for myself. If then I am to write no more (though as much out of my profession as they may please to represent this work, I suspect their modesty would not insist on a scrutiny of our several applications of this prophane profit and their purer gains) if, I say, I am to write no more, let me at least give the publick, who have a better pretence to demand it of me, some reason for my presenting them with these amusements; which, if I am not much mistaken, may be excused by the best and fairest *examples*; and, what is more, may be justified on the surer *reason of things*.

The great Saint CHRYSOSTOM, a name consecrated to immortality by his virtue and eloquence, is known to have been so fond of Aristophanes, as to wake with him at his studies, and to sleep with him under his pillow: and I never heard that this was objected either to his piety or his preaching, not even in those times of pure zeal and primitive religion. Yet, in respect of Shakspeare's great sense, Aristophanes's best wit is but buffoonery; and, in comparison of Aristophanes's freedoms, Shakspeare writes with the purity of a vestal. But they will say, St. Chrysostom contracted a fondness for the comick

comick poet *for the sake of his Greek*. To this, indeed, I have nothing to reply. Far be it from me to insinuate so unscholarlike a thing, as if we had the same use for good English, that a Greek had for his Attick elegance. Critick Kuster, in a taste and language peculiar to grammarians of a certain order, hath decreed, that *the history and chronology of Greek words is the most SOLID entertainment of a man of letters*.

I fly then to a higher example, much nearer home, and still more in point, the famous university of OXFORD. This illustrious body, which hath long so justly held, and with such equity dispensed, the chief honours of the learned world, thought good letters so much interested in correct editions of the best English writers, that they, very lately, in their publick capacity, undertook *one* of this very author by subscription. And if the editor hath not discharged his task with suitable abilities for one so much honoured by them, this was not their fault, but his, who thrust himself into the employment. After such an example, it would be weakening any defence to seek further for authorities. All that can be now decently urged, is the *reason of the thing*; and this I shall do, more for the sake of that truly venerable body than my own.

Of all the literary exercitations of speculative men, whether designed for the use or entertainment of the world, there are none of so much importance, or what are more our immediate concern, than those which let us into the knowledge of our nature. Others may

exercise the reason, or amuse the imagination; but these only can improve the heart, and form the human mind to wisdom. Now, in this science, our Shakspeare is confessed to occupy the foremost place; whether we consider the amazing sagacity with which he investigates every hidden spring and wheel of human action; or his happy manner of communicating this knowledge, in the just and living paintings which he has given us of all our passions, appetites, and pursuits. These afford a lesson which can never be too often repeated, or too constantly inculcated; and, to engage the reader's due attention to it, hath been one of the principal objects of this edition.

As this science (whatever profound philosophers may think) is, to the rest, *in things*; so, *in words* (whatever supercilious pedants may talk), every one's mother tongue is to all other languages. This hath still been the sentiment of nature and true wisdom. Hence, the greatest men of antiquity never thought themselves better employed, than in cultivating their own country idiom. So Lycurgus did honour to Sparta, in giving the first complete edition of Homer; and Cicero to Rome, in correcting the works of Lucretius. Nor do we want examples of the same good sense in modern times, even amidst the cruel inroads that art and fashion have made upon nature and the simplicity of wisdom. Menage, the greatest name in France for all kinds of philologick learning, prided himself in writing critical notes on their best lyrick poet, Malherbe:

Malherbe : and our greater Selden, when he thought it might reflect credit on his country, did not disdain even to comment a very ordinary poet, one Michael Drayton. But the English tongue, at this juncture, deserves and demands our particular regard. It hath, by means of the many excellent works of different kinds composed in it, engaged the notice, and become the study, of almost every curious and learned foreigner, so as to be thought even a part of literary accomplishment. This must needs make it deserving of a critical attention : and its being yet destitute of a test or standard to apply to, in cases of doubt or difficulty, shews how much it wants that attention. For we have neither GRAMMAR nor DICTIONARY, neither chart nor compass, to guide us through this wide sea of words. And indeed how should we ? since both are to be composed and finished on the authority of our best established writers. But their authority can be of little use, till the text hath been correctly settled, and the phraseology critically examined. As then, by these aids, a *Grammar* and *Dictionary*, planned upon the best rules of logick and philosophy (and none but such will deserve the name), are to be procured ; the forwarding of this will be a general concern : for, as Quintilian observes, “ *Verborum proprietas ac differentia omnibus, qui sermonem curæ habent, debet esse communis.*” By this way, the Italians have brought their tongue to a degree of purity and stability, which no living language ever attained unto before. It is with pleasure I observe, that these things now

begin to be understood among ourselves; and that I can acquaint the publick, we may soon expect very elegant editions of Fletcher and *Milton's Paradise Lost* from gentlemen of distinguished abilities and learning. But this interval of good sense, as it may be short, is indeed but new. For I remember to have heard of a very learned man, who, not long since, formed a design of giving a more correct edition of Spenser; and, without doubt, would have performed it well; but he was dissuaded from his purpose by his friends, as beneath the dignity of a professor of the occult sciences. Yet these very friends, I suppose, would have thought it had added lustre to his high station, to have new-furnished out some dull northern chronicle, or dark Sibylline ænigma. But let it not be thought, that what is here said insinuates any thing to the discredit of Greek and Latin criticism. If the follies of particular men were sufficient to bring any branch of learning into disrepute, I do not know any that would stand in a worse situation than that for which I now apologize. For I hardly think there ever appeared, in any *learned* language, so execrable a heap of nonsense, under the name of commentaries, as hath been lately given us on a certain satirick poet, of the last age, by his editor and coadjutor*.

I am sensible how unjustly the very best *classical* criticks have been treated. It is said, that our great

* This alludes to Dr. Grey's edition of *Hudibras*, published in 1744. REED.

philosopher * spoke with much contempt of the two finest scholars of this age, Dr. Bentley and Bishop Hare, for squabbling, as he expressed it, about an old play-book ; meaning, I suppose, Terence's comedies. But this story is unworthy of him : though well enough suiting the fanatick turn of the wild writer that relates it ; such censures are amongst the follies of men immoderately given over to one science, and ignorantly undervaluing all the rest. Those learned criticks might, and perhaps did, laugh in their turn (though still, sure, with the same indecency and indiscretion) at that incomparable man, for wearing out a long life in poring through a telescope. Indeed, the weaknesses of such are to be mentioned with reverence. But who can bear, without indignation, the fashionable cant of every trifling writer, whose insipidity passes, with himself, for politeness, for pretending to be shocked, forsooth, with the rude and savage air of *vulgar* criticks ; meaning such as Muretus, Scaliger, Casaubon, Salmasius, Spanheim, Bentley ! When, had it not been for the deathless labours of such as these, the western world, at the revival of letters, had soon fallen back again into a state of ignorance and barbarity, as deplorable as that from which Providence had just redeemed it.

* Sir Isaac Newton. See Whiston's Historical Memoirs of the Life of Dr. Clarke, 1748, 8vo. p. 113. REED.

To conclude with an observation of a fine writer and great philosopher of our own; which I would gladly bind, though with all honour, as a phylactery, on the brow of every awful grammarian, to teach him at once the *use* and *limits* of his art: WORDS ARE THE MONEY OF FOOLS, AND THE COUNTERS OF WISE MEN.

ADVER-

ADVERTISEMENT

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THE plays of SHAKSPERE have been so often republished, with every seeming advantage which the joint labours of men of the first abilities could procure for them, that one would hardly imagine they could stand in need of any thing beyond the illustration of some few dark passages. Modes of expression must remain in obscurity, or be retrieved from time to time, as chance may throw the books of that age into the hands of criticks who shall make a proper use of them. Many have been of opinion that his language will continue difficult to all those who are unacquainted with the provincial expressions which they suppose him to have used; but, for my own part, I cannot believe but that those which are now local may once have been universal, and must have been the language of those persons before whom his plays were represented.

However,

However, it is certain that the instances of obscurity from this source are very few.

Some have been of opinion that even a particular syntax prevailed in the time of Shakspeare; but, as I do not recollect that any proofs were ever brought in support of that sentiment, I own I am of the contrary opinion.

In his time, indeed, a different arrangement of syllables had been introduced in imitation of the Latin, as we find in Ascham; and the verb was very frequently kept back in the sentence; but in Shakspeare no marks of it are discernible: and though the rules of syntax were more strictly observed by the writers of that age than they have been since, he of all the number is perhaps the most ungrammatical. To make his meaning intelligible to his audience seems to have been his only care, and with the ease of conversation he has adopted its incorrectness.

The past editors, eminently qualified as they were by genius and learning for this undertaking, wanted industry; to cover which they published catalogues, transcribed at random, of a greater number of old copies than ever they can be supposed to have had in their possession; when, at the same time, they never examined the few which we know they had, with any degree of accuracy. The last editor alone has dealt fairly with the world in this particular; he professes to have made use of no more than he had really seen, and has annexed a list of such to every play, together with a complete one of those supposed to be in being,
at

at the conclusion of his work, whether he had been able to procure them for the service of it, or not.

For these reasons I thought it would not be unacceptable to the lovers of Shakspeare to collate all the quartos I could find, comparing one copy with the rest, where there were more than one of the same play; and to multiply the chances of their being preserved, by collecting them into volumes, instead of leaving the few that have escaped, to share the fate of the rest, which was probably hastened by their remaining in the form of pamphlets, their use and value being equally unknown to those into whose hands they fell.

Of some I have printed more than one copy; as there are many persons, who, not contented with the possession of a finished picture of some great master, are desirous to procure the first sketch that was made for it, that they may have the pleasure of tracing the progress of the artist from the first light colouring to the finishing stroke. To such the earlier editions of *King John*, *Henry the Fifth*, *Henry the Sixth*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, will, I apprehend, not be unwelcome; since in these we may discern as much as will be found in the hasty outlines of the pencil, with a fair prospect of that perfection to which he brought every performance he took the pains to retouch.

The general character of the quarto editions may more advantageously be taken from the words of Mr. Pope, than from any recommendation of my own.

“ The

“ The folio edition (says he) in which all the plays
 “ we now receive as his were first collected, was
 “ published by two players, Heminge and Condell,
 “ in 1623, seven years after his decease. They de-
 “ clare that all the other editions were stolen and
 “ surreptitious *, and affirm theirs to be purged from
 “ the errors of the former. This is true as to the
 “ literal errors, and no other ; for in all respects else
 “ it is far worse than the quartos.

“ First, because the additions of trifling and bom-
 “ bast passages are in this edition far more nume-
 “ rous. For whatever had been added since those
 “ quartos by the actors, or had stolen from their
 “ mouths into the written parts, were from thence
 “ convey'd into the printed text, and all stand charg-
 “ ed upon the author. He himself complained of
 “ this usage in *Hamlet*, where he wishes *those who play*
 “ *the clown would speak no more than is set down for them.*
 “ (Act iii. Sc. iv.) But as a proof that he could
 “ not escape it, in the old editions of *Romeo and*
 “ *Juliet*, there is no hint of the mean conceits and
 “ ribaldries now to be found there. In others, the
 “ scenes of the mobs, plebeians, and clowns, are
 “ vastly shorter than at present ; and I have seen one

* It may be proper on this occasion to observe, that the actors printed several of the plays in their folio edition from the very quarto copies which they are here striving to depreciate ; and additional corruption is the utmost that these copies gained by passing through their hands.

“ in

“ in particular (which seems to have belonged to the
“ play-house, by having the parts divided by lines,
“ and the actors names in the margin) where several
“ of those very passages were added in a written
“ hand, which since are to be found in the folio.

“ In the next place, a number of beautiful passages
“ were omitted, which were extant in the first single
“ editions; as it seems without any other reason than
“ their willingness to shorten some scenes.”

To this I must add, that I cannot help looking on the folio as having suffered other injuries from the licentious alteration of the players; as we frequently find in it an unusual word changed into one more popular; sometimes to the weakening of the sense, which rather seems to have been their work, who knew that plainness was necessary for the audience of an illiterate age, than that it was done by the consent of the author: for he would hardly have unnerved a line in his written copy, which they pretend to have transcribed, however he might have permitted many to have been familiarized in the representation. Were I to indulge my own private conjecture, I should suppose that his blotted manuscripts were read over by one to another among those who were appointed to transcribe them; and hence it would easily happen, that words of similar sound, though of senses directly opposite, might be confounded with each other. They themselves declare that Shakspeare's time of blotting was past, and yet half the errors we find in their edition could not be

merely typographical. Many of the quartos (as our own printers assure me) were far from being unskillfully executed, and some of them were much more correctly printed than the folio, which was published at the charge of the same proprietors, whose names we find prefixed to the older copies; and I cannot join with Mr. Pope in acquitting that edition of more literal errors than those which went before it. The particles in it seem to be as fortuitously disposed, and proper names as frequently undistinguished by Italic or capital letters from the rest of the text. The punctuation is equally accidental; nor do I see on the whole any greater marks of a skilful revisal, or the advantage of being printed from unblotted originals in the one, than in the other. One reformation indeed there seems to have been made, and that very laudable; I mean the substitution of more general terms for a name too often unnecessarily invoked on the stage; but no jot of obscenity is omitted: and their caution against prophaneness is, in my opinion, the only thing for which we are indebted to the judgment of the editors of the folio*.

* “And their caution against prophaneness is, in my opinion, the only thing for which we are indebted to the editors of the folio.”

I doubt whether we are so much indebted to the *judgment* of the editors of the folio edition, for their caution against prophaneness, as to the statute, 3 Jac. I. c. 21. which prohibits, under severe penalties, the use of the sacred name in any plays or interludes. This occasioned the playhouse copies to be altered, and they printed from the playhouse copies. BLACKSTONE.

How

How much may be done by the assistance of the old copies will now be easily known; but a more difficult task remains behind, which calls for other abilities than are requisite in the laborious collator.

From a diligent perusal of the comedies of contemporary authors, I am persuaded that the meaning of many expressions in Shakspeare might be retrieved; for the language of conversation can only be expected to be preserved in works, which in their time assumed the merit of being pictures of men and manners. The style of conversation we may suppose to be as much altered as that of books; and, in consequence of the change, we have no other authorities to recur to in either case. Should our language ever be recalled to a strict examination, and the fashion become general of striving to maintain our old acquisitions, instead of gaining new ones, which we shall be at last obliged to give up, or be incumbered with their weight; it will then be lamented that no regular collection was ever formed of the old English books; from which, as from ancient repositories, we might recover words and phrases as often as caprice or wantonness should call for variety; instead of thinking it necessary to adopt new ones, or barter solid strength for feeble splendour, which no language has long admitted, and retained its purity.

We wonder that, before the time of Shakspeare, we find the stage in a state so barren of productions, but forget that we have hardly any acquaintance with the authors of that period, though some few of their

dramatick pieces may remain. The same might be almost said of the interval between that age and the age of Dryden, the performances of which, not being preserved in sets, or diffused as now, by the greater number printed, must lapse apace into the same obscurity.

*Vixere fortes ante Agamemnonæ
Multi—————*

And yet we are contented, from a few specimens only, to form our opinions of the genius of ages gone before us. Even while we are blaming the taste of that audience which received with applause the worst plays in the reign of Charles the Second, we should consider that the few in possession of our theatre, which would never have been heard a second time had they been written now, were probably the best of hundreds which had been dismissed with general censure. The collection of plays, interludes, &c. made by Mr. Garrick, with an intent to deposit them hereafter in some public library *, will be considered as a valuable acquisition; for pamphlets have never yet been examined with a proper regard to posterity. Most of the obsolete pieces will be found on inquiry to have been introduced into libraries but some few years since; and yet those of the present age, which may

* This collection is now, in pursuance of Mr. Garrick's Will, placed in the British Museum. REED.

one time or other prove as useful, are still entirely neglected. I should be remiss, I am sure, were I to forget my acknowledgments to the gentleman I have just mentioned, to whose benevolence I owe the use of several of the scarcest quartos, which I could not otherwise have obtained; though I advertised for them, with sufficient offers, as I thought, either to attempt the casual owner to sell, or the curious to communicate them; but Mr. Garrick's zeal would not permit him to withhold any thing that might ever so remotely tend to shew the perfections of that author who could only have enabled him to display his own.

It is not merely to obtain justice to Shakspeare, that I have made this collection, and advise others to be made. The general interest of English literature, and the attention due to our own language and history, require that our ancient writings should be diligently reviewed. There is no age which has not produced some works that deserved to be remembered; and as words and phrases are only understood by comparing them in different places, the lower writers must be read for the explanation of the highest. No language can be ascertained and settled, but by deducting its words from their original sources, and tracing them through their successive varieties of signification; and this deduction can only be performed by consulting the earliest and intermediate authors.

Enough has been already done to encourage us to do more. Dr. Hickes, by reviving the study of the Saxon language, seems to have excited a stronger curiosity after old English writers, than ever had appeared before. Many volumes, which were mouldering in dust, have been collected; many authors, which were forgotten, have been revived; many laborious catalogues have been formed; and many judicious glossaries compiled: the literary transactions of the darker ages are now open to discovery; and the language in its intermediate gradations, from the Conquest to the Restoration, is better understood than in any former time.

To incite the continuance, and encourage the extension of this domestick curiosity, is one of the purposes of the present publication. In the plays it contains, the poet's first thoughts, as well as words, are preserved; the additions made in subsequent impressions distinguished in Italicks, and the performances themselves make their appearance with every typographical error, such as they were before they fell into the hands of the player-editors. The various readings, which can only be attributed to chance, are set down among the rest, as I did not chuse arbitrarily to determine for others which were useless, or which were valuable. And many words differing only by the spelling, or serving merely to shew the difficulties which they to whose lot it first fell to disentangle their perplexities must have encountered, are exhibited with the rest. I must acknowledge that some few readings
have

have slipped in by mistake, which can pretend to serve no purpose of illustration, but were introduced by confining myself to note the minutest variations of the copies, which soon convinced me that the oldest were in general the most correct. Though no proof can be given that the poet superintended the publication of any one of these himself, yet we have little reason to suppose that he who wrote at the command of Elizabeth, and under the patronage of Southampton, was so very negligent of his fame, as to permit the most incompetent judges, such as the players were, to vary at their pleasure what he had set down for the first single editions ; and we have better grounds for a suspicion, that his works did materially suffer from their presumptuous corrections after his death.

It is very well known, that before the time of Shakspeare, the art of making title-pages was practised with as much, or perhaps more success than it has been since. Accordingly, to all his plays we find long and descriptive ones, which, when they were first published, were of great service to the venders of them. Pamphlets of every kind were hawked about the streets by a set of people resembling his own *Autolycus*, who proclaimed aloud the qualities of what they offered to sale, and might draw in many a purchaser by the mirth he was taught to expect from *the humours of Corporal Nym*, or *the swaggering vaine of Auncient Pistoll*, who was not to be tempted by the representation

tation of a fact merely historical. The players, however, laid aside the whole of this garniture, not finding it so necessary to procure success to a bulky volume, when the author's reputation was established, as it had been to bespeak attention to a few straggling pamphlets while it was yet uncertain.

The sixteen plays, which are not in these volumes, remained unpublished till the folio in the year 1623, though the compiler of a work, called *Theatrical Records*, mentions different single editions of them all before that time. But as no one of the editors could ever meet with such, nor has any one else pretended to have seen them, I think myself at liberty to suppose the compiler supplied the defects of the list out of his own imagination ; since he must have had singular and good fortune to have been possessed of two or three different copies of all, when neither editors nor collectors, in the course of near fifty years, have been able so much as to obtain the sight of one of the number *.

At

* It will be obvious to every one acquainted with the ancient English language, that in almost all the titles of plays in this catalogue of Mr. *William Rufus Chetwood*, the spelling is constantly overcharged with such a superfluity of letters as is not to be found in the writings of Shakspeare or his contemporaries. A more bungling attempt at a forgery was never obtruded on the publick. See the *British Theatre* 1750 ; reprinted by Dodsley in 1756, under the title of *Theatrical Records, or an Account of English Dramatick Authors,*

At the end of the last volume I have added a tragedy of *King Leir*, published before that of Shakspeare, which it is not improbable he might have seen, as the father kneeling to the daughter, when she kneels to ask his blessing, is found in it; a circumstance two poets were not very likely to have hit on separately; and which seems borrowed by the latter with his usual judgment, it being the most natural passage in the whole play; and is introduced in such a manner, as to make it fairly his own. The ingenious editor of *The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* having never met with this play, and as it is not preserved in Mr. Garrick's collection, I thought it a curiosity worthy the notice of the publick.

I have likewise reprinted Shakspeare's *Sonnets* from a copy published in 1609, by G. Eld, one of the printers of his plays; which, added to the consideration that they made their appearance with his name, and in his lifetime, seems to be no slender proof of their authenticity. The same evidence might operate in favour of several more plays which are omitted here, out of respect to the judgment of those who had omitted them before*.

Authors, and their Works," where all that is said concerning an advertisement at the end of *Romeo and Juliet*, 1697, is equally false, no copy of that play having been ever published by *Andrew Wise*.

* *Lochrine*, 1595. *Sir John Oldcastle*, 1600. *London Prodigal*, 1605. *Pericles Prince of Tyre*, 1609. *Puritan*, 1600. *Thomas Lord Cromwell*, 1613. *Yorkshire Tragedy*, 1608.

It

It is to be wished that some method of publication, most favourable to the character of an author, were once established ; whether we are to send into the world all his works without distinction, or arbitrarily to leave out what may be thought a disgrace to him. The first editors, who rejected *Pericles*, retained *Titus Andronicus* ; and Mr. Pope, without any reason, named *The Winter's Tale*, a play that bears the strongest marks of the hand of Shakspeare, among those which he supposed to be spurious. Dr. Warburton has fixed a stigma on the three parts of *Henry the Sixth*, and some others :

Inde Dolabella est, atque hinc Antonius ;

and all have been willing to plunder Shakspeare, or mix up *a breed of barren metal* with his purest ore.

Joshua Barnes, the editor of Euripides, thought every scrap of his author so sacred, that he has preserved, with the name of one of his plays, the only remaining word of it. The same reason indeed might be given in his favour, which caused the preservation of that valuable trisyllable : which is, that it cannot be found in any other place in the Greek language. But this does not seem to have been his only motive, as we find he has to the full as carefully published several detached and broken sentences, the gleanings from scholiasts, which have no claim to merit of that kind ; and yet the author's works might be reckoned by some to be incomplete without them.

them. If then this duty is expected from every editor of a Greek or Roman poet, why is not the same insisted on in respect of an English classick? But if the custom of preserving all, whether worthy of it or not, be *more honoured in the breach than the observance*, the suppression at least should not be considered as a fault. The publication of such things as Swift had written, merely to raise a laugh among his friends, has added something to the bulk of his works, but very little to his character as a writer. The four volumes* that came out since Dr. Hawkesworth's edition, not to look on them as a tax levied on the publick (which I think one might without injustice), contain not more than sufficient to have made one of real value; and there is a kind of dissingenuity, not to give it a harsher title, in exhibiting what the author never meant should see the light; for no motive, but a sordid one, can betray the survivors to make that publick, which they themselves must be of opinion will be unfavourable to the memory of the dead.

Life does not often receive good unmixed with evil. The benefits of the art of printing are depraved by the facility with which scandal may be diffused, and secrets revealed; and by the temptation by which traffick solicits avarice to betray the

* Volumes XIII. XIV. XV. and XVI. in large 8vo. Nine more have since been added. REED.

weaknesses of passion, or the confidence of friendship.

I cannot forbear to think these posthumous publications injurious to society. A man conscious of literary reputation will grow in time afraid to write with tenderness to his sister, or with fondness to his child ; or to remit on the slightest occasion, or most pressing exigence, the rigour of critical choice, and grammatical severity. That esteem which preserves his letters will at last produce his disgrace ; when that which he wrote to his friend or his daughter shall be laid open to the publick.

There is perhaps sufficient evidence, that most of the plays in question, unequal as they may be to the rest, were written by Shakspeare ; but the reason generally given for publishing the less correct pieces of an author, that it affords a more impartial view of a man's talents or way of thinking, than when we only see him in form, and prepared for our reception, is not enough to condemn an editor who thinks and practises otherwise. For what is all this to shew, but that every man is more dull at one time than another ; a fact which the world would easily have admitted, without asking any proofs in its support that might be destructive to an author's reputation.

To conclude ; if the work, which this publication was meant to facilitate, has been already performed, the satisfaction of knowing it to be so may be obtained from hence ; if otherwise, let those who raised expectations of correctness, and through negligence
defeated

defeated them, be justly exposed by future editors, who will now be in possession of by far the greatest part of what they might have inquired after for years to no purpose ; for in respect of such a number of the old quartos as are here exhibited, the first folio is a common book. This advantage will at least arise, that future editors, having equally recourse to the same copies, can challenge distinction and preference only by genius, capacity, industry, and learning.

As I have only collected materials for future artists, I consider what I have been doing as no more than an apparatus for their use. If the publick is inclined to receive it as such, I am amply rewarded for my trouble ; if otherwise, I shall submit with cheerfulness to the censure which should equitably fall on an injudicious attempt ; having this consolation, however, that my design amounted to no more than a wish to encourage others to think of preserving the oldest editions of the English writers, which are growing scarcer every day ; and to afford the world all the assistance or pleasure it can receive from the most authentick copies extant of its NOBLEST POET.

G. S.

K

DR.

DR. JOHNSON'S
P R E F A C E.

THAT praises are without reason lavished on the dead, and that the honours due only to excellence are paid to antiquity, is a complaint likely to be always continued by those, who, being able to add nothing to truth, hope for eminence from the heresies of paradox ; or those, who, being forced by disappointment upon consolatory expedients, are willing to hope from posterity what the present age refuses, and flatter themselves that the regard, which is yet denied by envy, will be at last bestowed by time.

Antiquity, like every other quality that attracts the notice of mankind, has undoubtedly votaries that reverence it, not from reason, but from prejudice. Some seem to admire indiscriminately whatever has been long preserved, without considering that time has sometimes co-operated with chance ; all perhaps are more willing to honour past than present excellence ; and the mind contemplates genius through the shades of age, as the eye surveys the sun through artificial opacity. The great contention of criticism is to find the faults of the moderns, and the beauties
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of the ancients. While an author is yet living, we estimate his powers by his worst performance; and, when he is dead, we rate them by his best.

To works, however, of which the excellence is not absolute and definite, but gradual and comparative; to works not raised upon principles demonstrative and scientifick, but appealing wholly to observation and experience, no other test can be applied than length of duration and continuance of esteem. What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared; and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour. As among the works of nature no man can properly call a river deep, or a mountain high, without the knowledge of many mountains, and many rivers; so, in the productions of genius, nothing can be styled excellent till it has been compared with other works of the same kind. Demonstration immediately displays its power, and has nothing to hope or fear from the flux of years; but works tentative and experimental must be estimated by their proportion to the general and collective ability of man, as it is discovered in a long succession of endeavours. Of the first building that was raised, it might be with certainty determined that it was round or square; but whether it was spacious or lofty must have been referred to time. The Pythagorean scale of numbers was at once discovered to be perfect: but the poems of Homer we yet know not to transcend the common limits of human intelligence, but by remarking, that nation after nation, and cen-

tury after century, has been able to do little more than transpose his incidents, new-name his characters, and paraphrase his sentiments.

The reverence due to writings that have long subsisted, arises, therefore, not from any credulous confidence in the superior wisdom of past ages, or gloomy persuasion of the degeneracy of mankind, but is the consequence of acknowledged and indubitable positions, that what has been longest known has been most considered, and what is most considered is best understood.

The poet, of whose works I have undertaken the revision, may now begin to assume the dignity of an ancient, and claim the privilege of established fame and prescriptive veneration. He has long outlived his century, the term commonly fixed as the test of literary merit. Whatever advantages he might once derive from personal allusions, local customs, or temporary opinions, have for many years been lost ; and every topick of merriment, or motive of sorrow, which he modes of artificial life afforded him, now only obscure the scenes which they once illuminated. The effects of favour and competition are at an end ; the tradition of his friendships and his enmities has perished ; his works support no opinion with arguments, nor supply any faction with invectives ; they can neither indulge vanity, nor gratify malignity ; but are read without any other reason than the desire of pleasure, and are therefore praised only as pleasure is obtained : yet, thus unassisted by interest or passion, they

they have past through variations of taste and change of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission.

But because human judgment, though it be gradually gaining upon certainty, never becomes infallible; and approbation, though long continued, may yet be only the approbation of prejudice or fashion; it is proper to inquire, by what peculiarities of excellence Shakspeare has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen.

Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.

Shakspeare is, above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but upon small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions: they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the world will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and

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speak by the influence of those general passions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets a character is too often an individual; in those of Shakspeare it is commonly a species.

It is from this wide extension of design that so much instruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakspeare with practical axioms and domestick wisdom. It was said of Euripides, that every verse was a precept; and it may be said of Shakspeare, that from his works may be collected a system of civil and œconomical prudence. Yet his real power is not shewn in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.

It will not easily be imagined how much Shakspeare excels in accommodating his sentiments to real life, but by comparing him with other authors. It was observed of the ancient schools of declamation, that the more diligently they were frequented, the more was the student disqualified for the world, because he found nothing there which he should ever meet in any other place. The same remark may be applied to every stage but that of Shakspeare. The theatre, when it is under any other direction, is peopled by

by such characters as were never seen, conversing in a language which was never heard, upon topicks which will never arise in the commerce of mankind. But the dialogue of this author is often so evidently determined by the incident which produces it, and is pursued with so much ease and simplicity, that it seems scarcely to claim the merit of fiction, but to have been gleaned by diligent selection out of common conversation, and common occurrences.

Upon every other stage the universal agent is love, by whose power all good and evil is distributed, and every action quickened or retarded. To bring a lover, a lady, and a rival into the fable; to entangle them in contradictory obligations, perplex them with oppositions of interest, and harass them with violence of desires inconsistent with each other; to make them meet in rapture, and part in agony; to fill their mouths with hyberbolical joy and outrageous sorrow; to distress them as nothing human ever was distressed; to deliver them as nothing human ever was delivered; is the business of a modern dramatist. For this, probability is violated, life is misrepresented, and language is depraved. But love is only one of many passions; and as it has no greater influence upon the sum of life, it has little operation in the dramas of a poet, who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he saw before him. He knew that any other passion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cause of happiness or calamity.

Characters, thus ample and general, were not easily discriminated and preserved; yet perhaps no poet ever kept

kept his personages more distinct from each other. I will not say with Pope, that every speech may be assigned to the proper speaker, because many speeches there are which have nothing characteristic; but, perhaps, though some may be equally adapted to every person, it will be difficult to find any that can be properly transferred from the present possessor to another claimant. The choice is right, when there is reason for choice.

Other dramatists can only gain attention by hyperbolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unexampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of barbarous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that should form his expectations of human affairs from the play, or from the tale, would be equally deceived. Shakspeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion: even where the agency is supernatural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers disguise the most natural passions and most frequent incidents; so that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world: Shakspeare approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful; the event which he represents will not happen; but, if it were possible, its effects would probably be such as he has assigned; and it may be said, that he has not only shewn human nature as it acts in real exigencies, but
as

as it would be found in trials, to which it cannot be exposed.

This therefore is the praise of Shakspeare, that his drama is the mirror of life; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raise up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human sentiments in human language, by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confessor predict the progress of the passions.

His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of criticks, who form their judgments upon narrower principles. Dennis and Rymer think his Romans not sufficiently Roman; and Voltaire censures his kings as not completely royal. Dennis is offended, that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon; and Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish usurper is represented as a drunkard. But Shakspeare always makes nature predominate over accident; and, if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or Kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to shew an usurper and a murderer not only odious, but despicable; he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like
other

other men, and that wine exerts its natural power upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds ; a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.

The censure which he has incurred by mixing comick and tragick scenes, as it extends to all his works, deserves more consideration. Let the fact be first stated, and then examined.

Shakspeare's plays are not, in the rigorous and critical sense, either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind ; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion, and innumerable modes of combination ; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another ; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend ; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolick of another ; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design.

Out of this chaos of mingled purposes and casualties, the ancient poets, according to the laws which custom had prescribed, selected some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities ; some the momentous vicissitudes of life, and some the lighter occurrences ; some the terrors of distress, and some the gaieties of prosperity. Thus rose the two modes of imitation, known by the names of *tragedy* and *comedy*,
compositions

compositions intended to promote different ends by contrary means, and considered as so little allied, that I do not recollect, among the Greeks or Romans, a single writer who attempted both.

Shakspeare has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow, not only in one mind, but in one composition. Almost all his plays are divided between serious and ludicrous characters ; and, in the successive evolutions of the design, sometimes produce seriousness and sorrow, and sometimes levity and laughter.

That this is a practice contrary to the rules of criticism will be readily allowed ; but there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature. The end of writing is to instruct ; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing. That the mingled drama may convey all the instruction of tragedy or comedy cannot be denied, because it includes, both in its alterations of exhibition, and approaches nearer than either to the appearance of life, by shewing how great machinations and slender designs may promote or obviate one another, and the high and the low co-operate in the general system by unavoidable concatenation.

It is objected, that by this change of scenes the passions are interrupted in their progression, and that the principal event, being not advanced by a due gradation of preparatory incidents, wants at last the power to move, which constitutes the perfection of dramattick poetry. This reasoning is so specious, that it is received as true even by those who in daily experience

rience feel it to be false. The interchanges of mingled scenes seldom fail to produce the intended vicissitudes of passion. Fiction cannot move so much, but that the attention may be easily transferred; and though it must be allowed that pleasing melancholy be sometimes interrupted by unwelcome levity, yet let it be considered likewise, that melancholy is often not pleasing, and that the disturbance of one man may be the relief of another; that different auditors have different habitudes; and that, upon the whole, all pleasure consists in variety.

The players, who in their edition divided our author's works into comedies, histories, and tragedies, seem not to have distinguished the three kinds by any very exact or definite ideas.

An action which ended happily to the principal persons, however serious or distressful through its intermediate incidents, in their opinion constituted a comedy. This idea of a comedy continued long amongst us; and plays were written, which, by changing the catastrophe, were tragedies to-day, and comedies to-morrow.

Tragedy was not in those times a poem of more general dignity or elevation than comedy; it required only a calamitous conclusion, with which the common criticism of that age was satisfied, whatever lighter pleasure it afforded in its progress.

History was a series of actions, with no other than chronological succession, independent on each other, and without any tendency to introduce or regulate the conclusion. It is not always very nicely distinguished

guished from tragedy. There is not much nearer approach to unity of action in the tragedy of *Antony and Cleopatra*, than in the history of *Richard the Second*. But a history might be continued through many plays; as it had no plan, it had no limits.

Through all these denominations of the drama, Shakspeare's mode of composition is the same; an interchange of seriousness and merriment, by which the mind is softened at one time, and exhilarated at another. But whatever be his purpose, whether to gladden or depress, or to conduct the story, without vehemence or emotion, through tracts of easy and familiar dialogue, he never fails to attain his purpose; as he commands us, we laugh or mourn, or sit silent with quiet expectation, in tranquillity without indifference.

When Shakspeare's plan is understood, most of the criticisms of Rymer and Voltaire vanish away. The play of *Hamlet* is opened, without impropriety, by two centinels; Iago bellows at Brabantio's window, without injury to the scheme of the play, though in terms which a modern audience would not easily endure; the character of Polonius is seasonable and useful; and the Grave-diggers themselves may be heard with applause.

Shakspeare engaged in dramattick poetry with the world open before him; the rules of the ancients were yet known to few; the publick judgment was unformed; he had no example of such fame as might force him upon imitation, nor criticks of such autho-

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rity as might restrain his extravagance; he therefore indulged his natural disposition; and his disposition, as Rymer has remarked, led him to comedy. In tragedy he often writes, with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but in his comick scenes, he seems to produce, without labour, what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comick; but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragick scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire. His comedy pleases by the thoughts and the language, and his tragedy, for the greater part, by incident and action. His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.

The force of his comick scenes has suffered little diminution, from the changes made by a century and a half, in manners or in words. As his personages act upon principles arising from genuine passion, very little modified by particular forms, their pleasures and vexations are communicable to all times and to all places; they are natural, and therefore durable: the adventitious peculiarities of personable habits are only superficial dyes, bright and pleasing for a little while, yet soon fading to a dim tinct, without any remains of former lustre; but the discriminations of true passion are the colours of nature: they pervade the whole mass, and can only perish with the body that exhibits them. The accidental compositions of heterogeneous modes are dissolved by the chance
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which combined them; but the uniform simplicity of primitive qualities neither admits increase, nor suffers decay. The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place. The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabricks of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakspeare.

If there be, what I believe there is, in every nation, a style which never becomes obsolete, a certain mode of phraseology so consonant and congenial to the analogy and principles of its respective language, as to remain settled and unaltered; this style is probably to be sought in the common intercourse of life, among those who speak only to be understood, without ambition of elegance. The polite are always catching modish innovations, and the learned depart from established forms of speech, in hopes of finding or making better; those who wish for distinction forsake the vulgar, when the vulgar is right; but there is a conversation above grossness, and below refinement, where propriety resides, and where this poet seems to have gathered his comick dialogue. He is therefore more agreeable to the ears of the present age than any other author equally remote, and among his other excellencies deserves to be studied as one of the original masters of our language.

These observations are to be considered not as unexceptionably constant, but as containing general and predominant truth. Shakspeare's familiar dialogue is affirmed to be smooth and clear, yet not wholly

without ruggedness or difficulty; as a country may be eminently fruitful, though it has spots unfit for cultivation: his characters are praised as natural, though their sentiments are sometimes forced, and their actions improbable; as the earth upon the whole is spherical, though its surface is varied with protuberances and cavities.

Shakspeare with his excellencies has likewise faults, and faults sufficient to obscure and overwhelm any other merit. I shall shew them in the proportion in which they appear to me, without envious malignity or superstitious veneration. No question can be more innocently discussed than a dead poet's pretensions to renown; and little regard is due to that bigotry which sets candour higher than truth.

His first defect is that to which may be imputed most of the evil in books or in men. He sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings, indeed, a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance. This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty
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to make the world better, and justice is a virtue independent on time or place.

The plots are often so loosely formed, that a very slight consideration may improve them, and so carelessly pursued, that he seems not always fully to comprehend his own design. He omits opportunities of instructing or delighting, which the train of his story seems to force upon him, and apparently rejects those exhibitions which would be more affecting, for the sake of those which are more easy.

It may be observed, that in many of his plays the latter part is evidently neglected. When he found himself near the end of his work, and in view of his reward, he shortened the labour to snatch the profit. He therefore remits his efforts where he should most vigorously exert them, and his catastrophe is improbably produced, or imperfectly represented.

He had no regard to distinction of time or place, but gives to one age or nation, without scruple, the customs, institutions, and opinions of another, at the expence not only of likelihood, but of possibility. These faults Pope has endeavoured, with more zeal than judgment, to transfer to his imagined interpolators. We need not wonder to find Hector quoting Aristotle, when we see the loves of Theseus and Hippolyta combined with the Gothick mythology of fairies. Shakspeare, indeed, was not the only violator of chronology; for, in the same age, Sidney, who wanted not the advantages of learning, has, in his *Arcadia*, confounded the pastoral with

the feudal times, the days of innocence, quiet, and security, with those of turbulence, violence, and adventure.

In his comic scenes he is seldom very successful, when he engages his characters in reciprocations of smartness and contests of sarcasm; their jests are commonly gross, and their pleasantry licentious; neither his gentlemen nor his ladies have much delicacy, nor are sufficiently distinguished from his clowns by any appearance of refined manners. Whether he represented the real conversation of his time is not easy to determine; the reign of Elizabeth is commonly supposed to have been a time of stateliness, formality, and reserve; yet perhaps the relaxations of that severity were not very elegant. There must, however, have been always some modes of gaiety preferable to others, and a writer ought to choose the best.

In tragedy, his performance seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more. The effusions of passion, which exigence forces out, are for the most part striking and energetick; but whenever he solicits his invention, or strains his faculties, the offspring of his throes is tumour, meanness, tediousness, and obscurity.

In narration, he affects a disproportionate pomp of diction, and a wearisome train of circumlocution, and tells the incident imperfectly in many words, which might have been more plainly delivered in few. Narration in dramattick poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated and inactive, and obstructs the progress

progress of the action; it should therefore always be rapid, and enlivened by frequent interruption. Shakspeare found it an incumbrance, and instead of lightening it by brevity, endeavoured to recommend it by dignity and splendour.

His declamations, or set speeches, are commonly cold and weak, for his power was the power of nature; when he endeavoured, like other tragick writers, to catch opportunities of amplification, and, instead of inquiring what the occasion demanded, to shew how much his stores of knowledge could supply, he seldom escapes without the pity or resentment of his reader.

It is incident to him to be now and then entangled with an unwieldy sentiment, which he cannot well express, and will not reject; he struggles with it a while, and, if it continues stubborn, comprises it in words such as occur, and leaves it to be disentangled and evolved by those who have more leisure to bestow upon it.

Not that always where the language is intricate the thought is subtle, or the image always great where the line is bulky; the quality of words to things is very often neglected, and trivial sentiments and vulgar ideas disappoint the attention, to which they are recommended by sonorous epithets and swelling figures.

But the admirers of this great poet have most reason to complain when he approaches nearest to his highest excellence, and seems fully resolved to sink them in dejection, and mollify them with tender emotions

tions by the fall of greatness, the danger of innocence, or the crosses of love. What he does best, he soon ceases to do. He is not long soft and pathetick without some idle conceit, or contemptible equivocation. He no sooner begins to move, than he counteracts himself; and terror and pity, as they are rising in the mind, are checked and blasted by sudden frigidity.

A quibble is to Shakspeare, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures; it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the mire. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disquisition, whether he be enlarging knowledge, or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or enchainning it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble, poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety, and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal Cleopatra for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it.

It will be thought strange, that, in enumerating the defects of this writer, I have not yet mentioned his neglect of the unities; his violation of those laws which have been instituted and established by the joint authority of poets and criticks.

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For his other deviations from the art of writing, I resign him to critical justice, without making any other demand in his favour, than that which must be indulged to all human excellence; that his virtues be rated with his failings: but, from the censure which this irregularity may bring upon him, I shall, with due reverence to that learning which I must oppose, adventure to try how I can defend him.

His histories, being neither tragedies nor comedies, are not subject to any of their laws; nothing more is necessary to all the praise which they expect, than that the changes of action be so prepared as to be understood, that the incidents be various and affecting, and the characters consistent, natural, and distinct. No other unity is intended, and therefore none is to be sought.

In his other works he has well enough preserved the unity of action. He has not, indeed, an intrigue regularly perplexed and regularly unravelled; he does not endeavour to hide his design only to discover it; for this is seldom the order of real events, and Shakspeare is the poet of nature: but his plan has commonly what Aristotle requires, a beginning, a middle, and an end; one event is concatenated with another, and the conclusion follows by easy consequence. There are perhaps some incidents that might be spared, as in other poets there is much talk that only fills up time upon the stage; but the general system makes gradual advances, and the end of the play is the end of expectation.

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To the unities of time and place he has shewn no regard; and perhaps a nearer view of the principles on which they stand will diminish their value, and withdraw from them the veneration which, from the time of Corneille, they have very generally received, by discovering that they have given more trouble to the poet, than pleasure to the auditor.

The necessity of observing the unities of time and place arises from the supposed necessity of making the drama credible. The criticks hold it impossible, that an action of months or years can be possibly believed to pass in three hours; or that the spectator can suppose himself to sit in the theatre, while ambassadors go and return between distant kings, while armies are levied and towns besieged, while an exile wanders and returns, or till he whom they saw courting his mistress, shall lament the untimely fall of his son. The mind revolts from evident falsehood, and fiction loses its force when it departs from the resemblance of reality.

From the narrow limitation of time necessarily arises the contraction of place. The spectator, who knows that he saw the first act at Alexandria, cannot suppose that he sees the next at Rome, at a distance to which not the dragons of Medea could, in so short a time, have transported him; he knows with certainty that he has not changed his place; and he knows that place cannot change itself; that what was a house cannot become a plain; that what was Thebes can never be Persepolis.

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Such is the triumphant language with which a critick exults over the misery of an irregular poet, and exults commonly without resistance or reply. It is time, therefore, to tell him by the authority of Shakspeare, that he assumes, as an unquestionable principle, a position, which, while his breath is forming it into words, his understanding pronounces to be false. It is false, that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramattick fable, in its materiality, was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited.

The objection arising from the impossibility of passing the first hour at Alexandria, and the next at Rome, supposes, that when the play opens, the spectator really imagines himself at Alexandria; and believes that his walk to the theatre has been a voyage to Egypt, and that he lives in the days of Antony and Cleopatra. Surely he that imagines this may imagine more. He that can take the stage at one time for the palace of the Ptolemies, may take it in half an hour for the promontory of Actium. Delusion, if delusion be admitted, has no certain limitation; if the spectator can be once persuaded, that his old acquaintance are Alexander and Cæsar, that a room illuminated with candles is the plain of Pharsalia, or the bank of Granicus, he is in a state of elevation above the reach of reason, or of truth, and from the heights of empyrean poetry, may despise the circumspections of terrestrial nature. There is no reason why a mind, thus wandering in ecstasy, should
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count the clock; or why an hour should not be a century in that calenture of the brains that can make the stage a field.

The truth is, that the spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players. They came to hear a certain number of lines recited with just gesture and elegant modulation. The lines relate to some action, and an action must be in some place; but the different actions that complete a tory may be in places very remote from each other; and where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first Athens, and then Sicily, which was always known to be neither Sicily nor Athens, but a moderate theatre.

By supposition, as place is introduced, time may be extended; the time required by the fable elapses for the most part between the acts; for, of so much of the action as is represented, the real and poetical duration is the same. If, in the first act, preparations for war against Mithridates are represented to be made in Rome, the event of the war may, without absurdity, be represented, in the catastrophe, as happening in Pontus; we know that there is neither war, nor preparation for war; we know that we are neither in Rome nor Pontus; that neither Mithridates nor Lucullus are before us. The drama exhibits successive imitations of successive actions; and why may not the second imitation represent an action that happened years after the first, if it be so connected with it, that
nothing

nothing but time can be supposed to intervene? Time is, of all modes of existence, most obsequious to the imagination; a lapse of years is as easily conceived as a passage of hours. In contemplation we easily contract the time of real actions, and therefore willingly permit it to be contracted when we only see their imitation.

It will be asked, how the drama moves, if it is not credited? It is credited with all the credit due to a drama. It is credited, whenever it moves, as a just picture of a real original; as representing to the auditor what he would himself feel, if he were to do or suffer what is there feigned to be suffered or to be done. The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed. If there be any fallacy, it is not that we fancy the players, but that we fancy ourselves unhappy for a moment; but we rather lament the possibility, than suppose the presence of misery, as a mother weeps over her babe, when she remembers that death may take it from her. The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more.

Imitations produce pain or pleasure, not because they are mistaken for realities, but because they bring realities to mind. When the imagination is recreated by a painted landscape, the trees are not supposed capable to give us shade, or the fountains coolness; but we consider how we should be pleased with such

fountains playing beside us, and such woods waving over us. We are agitated in reading the history of *Henry the Fifth*, yet no man takes his book for the field of Agincourt. A dramattick exhibition is a book recited with concomitants that increase or diminish its effect. Familiar comedy is often more powerful on the theatre, than in the page; imperial tragedy is always less. The humour of Petruchio may be heightened by grimace; but what voice or what gesture can hope to add dignity or force to the soliloquy of Cato?

A play read affects the mind like a play acted. It is therefore evident, that the action is not supposed to be real; and it follows, that between the acts a longer or shorter time may be allowed to pass, and that no more account of space or duration is to be taken by the auditor of a drama, than by the reader of a narrative, before whom may pass, in an hour, the life of a hero, or the revolutions of an empire.

Whether Shakspeare knew the unities, and rejected them by design, or deviated from them by happy ignorance, it is, I think, impossible to decide, and useless to inquire. We may reasonably suppose, that, when he rose to notice, he did not want the counsels and admonitions of scholars and criticks, and that he at last deliberately persisted in a practice, which he might have begun by chance. As nothing is essential to the fable but unity of action, and as the unities of time and place arise evidently from false assumptions, and, by circumscribing the extent of
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the drama, lessen its variety, I cannot think it much to be lamented, that they were not known by him, or not observed: nor, if such another poet could arise, should I very vehemently reproach him, that his first act passed at Venice, and his next in Cyprus. Such violations of rules, merely positive, become the comprehensive genius of Shakspeare, and such censures are suitable to the minute and slender criticism of Voltaire:

*Non usque adeo permiscuit imis
Longus summa dies, ut non, si voce Metelli
Serventur leges, malint a Cæsare tolli.*

Yet when I speak thus slightly of dramatick rules, I cannot but recollect how much wit and learning may be produced against me; before such authorities I am afraid to stand, not that I think the present question one of those that are to be decided by mere authority, but because it is to be suspected, that these perhaps have not been so easily received, but for better reasons than I have yet been able to find. The result of my inquiries, in which it would be ludicrous to boast of impartiality, is, that the unities of time and place are not essential to a just drama, that though they may sometimes conduce to pleasure, they are always to be sacrificed to the nobler beauties of variety and instruction; and that a play written with nice observation of critical rules, is to be contemplated as an elaborate curiosity, as the product of super-

fluorous and ostentatious art, by which is shewn, rather what is possible, than what is necessary.

He that, without diminution of any other excellence, shall preserve all the unities unbroken, deserves the like applause with the architect, who shall display all the orders of architecture in a citadel, without any deduction from its strength: but the principal beauty of a citadel is to exclude the enemy; and the greatest graces of a play are to copy nature, and instruct life.

Perhaps, what I have here not dogmatically but deliberately written, may recall the principles of the drama to a new examination. I am almost frightened at my own temerity; and when I estimate the fame and the strength of those that maintain the contrary opinion, am ready to sink down in reverential silence; as Æneas withdrew from the defence of Troy, when he saw Neptune shaking the wall, and Juno heading the besiegers.

Those whom my arguments cannot persuade to give their approbation to the judgment of Shakspeare, will easily, if they consider the condition of his life, make some allowance for his ignorance.

Every man's performances, to be rightly estimated, must be compared with the state of the age in which he lived, and with his own particular opportunities; and though to a reader a book be not worse or better for the circumstances of the author, yet as there is always a silent reference of human works to human abilities, and as the inquiry, how far man may extend
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his designs, or how high he may rate his native force, is of far greater dignity than in what rank we shall place any particular performance, curiosity is always busy to discover the instruments, as well as to survey the workmanship, to know how much is to be ascribed to original powers, and how much is to casual and adventitious help. The palaces of Peru or Mexico were certainly mean and incommodious habitations, if compared to the houses of European monarchs; yet who could forbear to view them with astonishment, who remembered that they were built without the use of iron?

The English nation, in the time of Shakspeare, was yet struggling to emerge from barbarity. The philology of Italy had been transplanted hither in the reign of Henry the Eighth; and the learned languages had been successfully cultivated by Lilly, Linacre, and More; by Pole, Cheke, and Gardiner; and afterwards by Smith, Clerk, Haddon, and Ascham. Greek was now taught to boys in the principal schools; and those who united elegance with learning, read, with great diligence, the Italian and Spanish poets. But literature was yet confined to professed scholars, or to men and women of high rank. The publick was gross and dark; and to be able to read and write, was an accomplishment still valued for its rarity.

Nations, like individuals, have their infancy. A people, newly awakened to literary curiosity, being yet unacquainted with the true state of things, knows

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not how to judge of that which is proposed as its resemblance. Whatever is remote from common appearances is always welcome to vulgar, as to childish credulity ; and of a country unenlightened by learning, the whole people is the vulgar. The study of those who then aspired to plebeian learning was laid out upon adventures, giants, dragons, and enchantments. *The Death of Arthur* was the favourite volume.

The mind, which has feasted on the luxurious wonders of fiction, has no taste of the insipidity of truth. A play, which imitated only the common occurrences of the world, would, upon the admirers of *Palmerin* and *Guy of Warwick*, have made little impression ; he that wrote for such an audience was under the necessity of looking round for strange events and fabulous transactions ; and that incredibility, by which maturer knowledge is offended, was the chief recommendation of writings, to unskilful curiosity.

Our author's plots are generally borrowed from novels ; and it is reasonable to suppose, that he chose the most popular, such as were read by many, and related by more ; for his audience could not have followed him through the intricacies of the drama, had they not held the thread of the story in their hands.

The stories, which we now find only in remoter authors, were in his time accessible and familiar. The fable of *As You Like It*, which is supposed to be copied
from

from *Chaucer's Gamelyn*, was a little pamphlet of those times ; and old Mr. Cibber remembered the tale of *Hamlet* in plain English prose, which the criticks have now to seek in *Saxo-Grammaticus*.

His English histories he took from English chronicles and English ballads ; and as the ancient writers were made known to his countrymen by versions, they supplied him with new subjects ; he dilated some of Plutarch's lives into plays, when they had been translated by North.

His plots, whether historical or fabulous, are always crowded with incidents, by which the attention of a rude people was more easily caught than by sentiment or argumentation ; and such is the power of the marvellous, even over those who despise it, that every man finds his mind more strongly seized by the tragedies of Shakspeare than of any other writer : others please us by particular speeches ; but he always makes us anxious for the event, and has, perhaps, excelled all but Homer in securing the first purpose of a writer, by exciting restless and unquenchable curiosity, and compelling him that reads his work to read it through.

The shows and bustle, with which his plays abound, have the same original. As knowledge advances, pleasure passes from the eye to the ear, but returns, as it declines, from the ear to the eye. Those to whom our author's labours were exhibited, had more skill in pomps or processions than in poetical language, and perhaps wanted some visible and discriminated events,

events, as comments on the dialogue. He knew how he should most please; and whether his practice is more agreeable to nature, or whether his example has prejudiced the nation, we still find, that on our stage something must be done as well as said, and inactive declamation is very coldly heard, however musical or elegant, passionate or sublime.

Voltaire expresses his wonder, that our author's extravagancies are endured by a nation, which has seen the tragedy of *Cato*. Let him be answered, that Addison speaks the language of poets; and Shakspeare, of men. We find in *Cato* innumerable beauties which enamour us of its author, but we see nothing that acquaints us with human sentiments or human actions; we place it with the fairest and the noblest progeny which judgment propagates by conjunction with learning; but *Othello* is the vigorous and vivacious offspring of observation impregnated by genius. *Cato* affords a splendid exhibition of artificial and fictitious manners, and delivers just and noble sentiments, in diction easy, elevated, and harmonious, but its hopes and fears communicate no vibration to the heart; the composition refers us only to the writer; we pronounce the name of *Cato*, but we think on *Addison*.

The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of Shakspeare is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, inter-

scattered sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished into brightness. Shakspeare opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in inexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.

It has been much disputed, whether Shakspeare owed his excellence to his own native force, or whether he had the common helps of scholastick education, the precepts of critical science, and the examples of ancient authors.

There has always prevailed a tradition, that Shakspeare wanted learning, that he had no regular education, nor much skill in the dead languages. Jonson, his friend, affirms, that *he had small Latin, and less Greek*; who, besides that he had no imaginable temptation to falsehood, wrote at a time when the character and acquisitions of Shakspeare were known to multitudes. His evidence ought therefore to decide the controversy, unless some testimony of equal force could be opposed.

Some have imagined, that they have discovered deep learning in many imitations of old writers; but the examples which I have known urged were drawn from books translated in his time; or were such easy coincidences of thought, as will happen to all who consider

consider the same subjects ; or such remarks on life, or axioms of morality, as float in conversation, and are transmitted through the world in proverbial sentences.

I have found it remarked, that in this important sentence, *Go before, I'll follow*, we read a translation of, *I præ, sequar*. I have been told, that when Caliban, after a pleasing dream, says, *I cry'd to sleep again*, the author imitates Anacreon, who had, like every other man, the same wish on the same occasion.

There are few passages which may pass for imitations, but so few, that the exception only confirms the rule ; he obtained them from accidental quotations, or by oral communication ; and as he used what he had, would have used more if he had obtained it.

The *Comedy of Errors* is confessedly taken from the *Menæchmi* of *Plautus* ; from the only play of *Plautus* which was then in English. What can be more probable, than that he who copied that would have copied more ; but that those which were not translated were inaccessible ?

Whether he knew the modern languages is uncertain. That his plays have some French scenes, proves but little ; he might easily procure them to be written, and probably, even though he had known the language in the common degree, he could not have written it without assistance. In the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, he is observed to have followed the
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English translation, where it deviates from the Italian ; but this, on the other part, proves nothing against his knowledge of the original. He was to copy, not what he knew himself, but what was known to his audience.

It is most likely that he had learned Latin sufficiently to make him acquainted with construction, but that he never advanced to an easy perusal of the Roman authors. Concerning his skill in modern languages, I can find no sufficient ground of determination ; but as no imitations of French or Italian authors have been discovered, though the Italian poetry was then high in esteem, I am inclined to believe, that he read little more than English, and chose for his fables only such tales as he found translated.

That much knowledge is scattered over his works is very justly observed by Pope, but it is often such knowledge as books did not supply. He that will understand Shakspeare must not be content to study him in the closet, he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop.

There is, however, proof enough that he was a very diligent reader, nor was our language then so indigent of books, but that he might very liberally indulge his curiosity without excursion into foreign literature. Many of the Roman authors were translated, and some of the Greek ; the Reformation had filled the kingdom with theological learning ; most of the to-
picks

picks of human disquisition had found English writers; and poetry had been cultivated, not only with diligence, but success. This was a stock of knowledge sufficient for a mind so capable of appropriating and improving it.

But the greater part of his excellence was the product of his own genius. He found the English stage in a state of the utmost rudeness; no essays either in tragedy or comedy had appeared, from which it could be discovered to what degree of delight either one or other might be carried. Neither character nor dialogue were yet understood. Shakspeare may be truly said to have introduced them both amongst us, and in some of his happier scenes to have carried them both to the utmost height.

By what gradations of improvement he proceeded, is not easily known; for the chronology of his works is yet unsettled. Rowe is of opinion, that *perhaps we are not to look for his beginning, like those of other writers, in his least perfect works; art had so little, and nature so large a share in what he did, that for aught I know, says he, the performances of his youth, as they were the most vigorous, were the best.* But the power of nature is only the power of using, to any certain purpose, the materials which diligence procures, or opportunity supplies. Nature gives no man knowledge, and, when images are collected by study and experience, can only assist in combining or applying them. Shakspeare, however favoured by nature, could impart only what he had learned; and, as he
must

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